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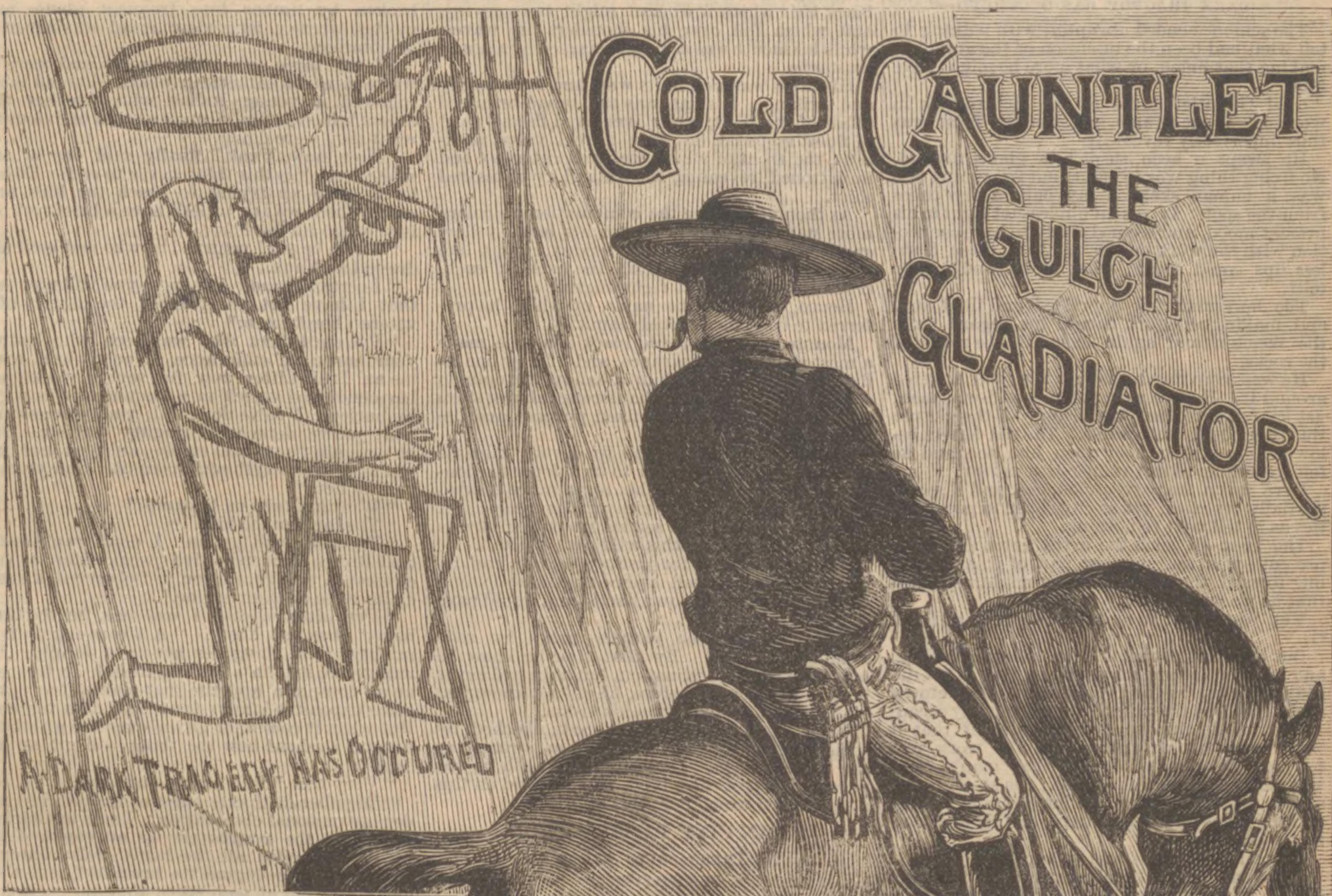
ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXVI. Published Every Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., September 7, 1887.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 463



OR,

Yank Yellowbird's Hot Campaign.

BY WM. H. MANNING,

AUTHOR OF "BLUFF BURKE," "WILD WEST WALT," "DEEP DUKE," "COLORADO RUBE," "THE GOLD DRAGON," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ROCKS.

THE feet of a horse rung on the rocky surface of a gulch, and a horseman rode slowly along between the precipitous cliffs. His manner was at once fearless and wary. He looked like one whom no danger could alarm, but nobody knew better than he that reckless exposure might cost him his life.

He was where he could only suppose every other man to be his deadly enemy, and from the boulders and recesses by the way men might at any moment appear.

Accustomed as he was to the West, from Colorado to California, he found this particular part especially wild—a fit resort for men he knew were not far away. He was seeking them,

GOLD GAUNTLET GAZED AT THE PICTURE-ROCK IN WONDER. WHAT STRANGE SECRET OF THE WEST WAS THUS IMPERFECTLY REVEALED?

yet he went as their enemy; they were many in number, yet he was coolly going to their midst without a friend to aid him.

Suddenly he reined in the large black horse which he rode. His wary gaze, sweeping from point to point, had detected something so strange that his abrupt pause was not to be wondered at.

At his right hand the cliff arose perpendicularly, and almost as smooth as though chiseled by human hands. Once this rocky wall had been plain and monotonous. It was so no longer.

Gold Gauntlet, as the horseman was called, gazed in amazement at what was then visible. Wild as the vicinity was, some artist had been there, for upon the rock was a picture as puzzling as it was strange and striking.

The chief part thereof was the picture of a man who was resting upon one knee and the foot of the other leg, while in one hand he held aloft an object which looked like an anchor. Back of him was another strange thing which the observer at first thought was intended to represent a loosely-coiled snake, but as he looked more closely he saw an unmistakable noose, and decided that it was a lasso.

This mysterious picture was done in deep red, and Gold Gauntlet at first thought that the color was produced by blood; but as he looked closer he decided that it was some pigment. Five words were printed in irregular letters below the picture:

"A DARK TRAGEDY HAS OCCURRED—"

The sentence ended abruptly, with nothing to tell what had been the intention of the author in making that much, or what more he might have told.

Gold Gauntlet gazed at the picture-rock in wonder. What strange secret of the West was thus imperfectly revealed?

He swept a keen, suspicious glance around. No living thing was in sight, but something else was; a human skeleton lay only a few paces from the spot. It was an unpleasant sight in his present mood, and seemed likely to have connection with the work on the cliff. If those fleshless lips could speak, what story would they tell?

The horseman felt oppressed and ill at ease, and, making an effort, turned his regard from the skeleton and again looked at the riddle of the rocks.

He was convinced that no idle joke hovered around it. He was a practical, world-wise man, yet he felt sure that the history of the picture was tragic and remarkable. The red letters below it took strong hold upon him, too, and he felt something akin to superstitious fear.

Here was a tragedy announced, and a secret partially revealed, yet so enveloped in peculiarities as to tell next to nothing.

The lasso—if such the artist intended to represent—was the simplest part of it, and, circling toward the kneeling man, might represent that he was caught in its noose.

Yet, where had it come from? Who had cast it?

But why had the man been shown kneeling, and holding the anchor partly aloft? What did the anchor represent? Why had it been pictured there, hundreds of miles distant from any ocean?

He tried in vain to convince himself that it was a cross, not an anchor, but the work was too good to admit of doubt. The man's hand was clasped around the shank; the stock rested across his wrist, with the ring dangling below; and the arms and flukes were plainly and correctly drawn.

Beyond question, it was an anchor.

The figure of the kneeling man, too, was well done. Expression was, naturally, lacking on the face, but from the fact that the coat was long and the hair on the hatless head evidently intended to be long and thin, the observer judged that an old man, who wore garments suitable to the East, was intended.

This was merely a surmise, for the artist might not have been as particular as he seemed.

In fact, the whole had an air of incompleteness. Why was there nothing to show from whence the lasso came? Why, too, was the printed revelation so brief?

"A DARK TRAGEDY HAS OCCURRED—"

There was nothing to show whether he who had printed these words had intended to add more, but it had the same incomplete appearance of the picture.

Another question occurred to Gold Gauntlet. Why had not the unknown confined all his work to words? With the amount of time bestowed on the picture he might have printed his revelation in full, in plain terms; the space was certainly ample.

There was a mystery about it which the observer in no way understood. His gaze persistently returned to the anchor. How could such a thing figure so far from vessels, oceans or navigable rivers?

"Useless!" finally ejaculated the horseman. "I might study it for days and be none the wiser. Whoever did the work intended to leave all wrapped in mystery, or something prevented completion of his work. I believe it was the latter. Perhaps he was wounded; perhaps he died

before it was finished. Anyway, the mystery is impenetrable."

The appearance of the red letters and picture showed that it was no very recent work. The spot was in a strong measure protected from storm, wind and sun; it might have been done months before.

"Another mystery of Utah!" muttered Gold Gauntlet. "I shall have to call it that, and let it go. I have work enough of my own, too much to puzzle over this riddle. I'll ride on."

He resumed his journey, but, though well aware that he ought to devote all his time and attention to precautions for his own safety, the mystery of the picture rocks haunted his mind persistently.

He felt sure that the strange work in red was not the result of idle amusement, but that the story so imperfectly told was a tragic one.

The rider of the mountains was a man worthy of more than passing notice, and one who was himself a mystery. Probably he had once had a name like other men, but that name had not of late passed his lips. He called himself Gold Gauntlet—that, and nothing more.

In point of years he looked to be about twenty-seven, and his form was one fit for a Hercules. Six feet in height, he had a development of form to match, with broad shoulders and a well-rounded chest, and long, large arms like a gladiator's.

His face was broad, regular, intelligent and bold, and his large black eyes were keen and brilliant. Upon his head was a mass of jet-black hair which a woman might have envied, and which fell over his shoulders in waves, while his mouth was almost concealed by a heavy mustache.

His dress was rich in its way, and both jaunty and striking. His hat was the broad-brimmed affair of the West, while over a red flannel shirt of finest material, he wore a real velvet sack-coat, the front of which was well cut away and unbuttoned, revealing the full glory of his red shirt.

As though to make the combination of colors more startling, he wore upon his hands yellow gauntlets, with two heavy golden chains, like those seen on watches, upon the back of each, crossing each other at right angles.

Hence, no doubt, the name by which he preferred to be known—Gold Gauntlet.

Mounted upon his noble black horse, he made a most striking appearance, and if any one at first sight pronounced him a dandy, the opinion would speedily vanish; that strong, almost stern face was that of a man of fixed purpose and determined will.

Plainly, he was not one to devote valuable time to trivial matters, or to be a fop intentionally or by accident. If his appearance seemed to savor of the vainglories of the peacock, it was as much part of a settled resolution as was his object in seeking this wild part of Utah.

And he was there for justice; to meet and defeat his enemies; well aware that in so coming he took his life in his own hands, and would have to guard it carefully.

After leaving the picture rocks he rode steadily for a mile. By that time he knew he must be near his destination, but as he had never been in the vicinity before, he did not know just when it would dawn upon his vision.

Once more he came to a halt, checked by something as significant, if not as strange, as the picture rocks. Directly in the path he was pursuing a post had been planted, and on this a sign-board which bore this inscription:

"DAN CITY RESERVATION.

NO TRESPASSING ALLOWED.

KEEP OFF!"

A sarcastic smile appeared on Gold Gauntlet's face. Barren and wild as the place was he knew that he was near Dan City, and it was not strange that the town had a "reservation." The warning, however, amused him, and after a swift glance around he started his horse again."

He had gone only a few steps when a man suddenly appeared from among the rocks and, rifle in hand, barred the way.

"Halt!" the stranger ordered tersely, commanding, but not with an especially hostile air.

"Happy to oblige you," Gold Gauntlet coolly replied.

"Didn't ye see that sign?" continued the rifleman.

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you obey it?"

"Does it mean business?"

"It does, fur sure."

"My friend, I am of an inquiring turn of mind—what is the penalty of refusing to obey?"

"Death!"

The answer was laconically made, and the rifleman seemed to grow more grim than ever.

"Am I to infer that you would shoot the man who persisted in intruding?"

"I would."

"By whose orders?"

"Yonder," answered the guard, pointing to the southwest, "is Dan City. I am a humble member o' the chosen band gathered thar; I git

my orders from the leaders, an' ef you would know who they be, go thar an' see them."

"Plain as the nose on your face, my good man. But why is this forbidden ground?"

"This," replied the rifleman, impatiently, "is Dan City Reservation. None but the faithful are allowed here, an' precious few o' them. Outsiders will not be let in."

"Another mystery," thought Gold Gauntlet, allowing his gaze to wander over the space before him. "It's a wild region, and it looks to be just as Nature made it, but it's safe to wager that there are important reasons for making it forbidden ground. This mystery may, or may not, concern me; I'll see after a few days at Dan City."

Then he said, aloud:

"Very well, my man; I have no wish to intrude; I was inclined to go on at first, but I see that I was wrong. Kindly indicate the way to Dan City."

The man pointed, and Gold Gauntlet rode away. He had, however, made a resolution. He had come to the vicinity as an enemy of the men of the town, and as he felt sure that it was a matter worthy of attention, he was determined to invade the Reservation before many days and discover the nature of the secret so jealously guarded.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOUNDED STRANGER.

THREE men rode across a prairie which was broken by timber into frequent glades and mottes, where a long view ahead was never to be obtained.

Of the three, two rode abreast and were of white skin and American blood. Behind them followed a young Indian who, whether the others talked or not, always seemed oblivious to what they were doing.

"How now, Yank," finally said one of the white men, "is this thing never to end? Either let us give up trying to reach the hills, and camp where we are, or let's have a brief rest before we go further."

"Tired, be ye?" returned he who had been addressed as Yank.

"I certainly am. I suppose you will now say that I have not yet reached the dignity of a veteran borderman."

"I've see'd them who was sech who hadn't your narve an' endurance. You've be'n with me an' Trail-Lifter now fur sev'ral weeks, an' hev conducted yerself in a commendable way, by hurley. You've done wal; you've done very wal; you've done most mighty wal, sir. But no man ain't a steam engine, an' you nor me can't endure ev'rything, I consait. Can ye ride half an hour?"

"Will that take us to camp?"

"Yas, an' ter the hills."

"Then we will go on. I don't want it said that Bronx Hendershot is a 'weak sister,' as you express it, though, as you just observed, I don't claim to be a steam engine."

"I've often wished I was one, fur the time bein'," observed Yank. "A steam-engine is a mighty useful thing ter hav in a family. I'd ruther hav it than a watch, though it has got an all-consumin' appetite that makes it an egregious expensive luxury fur a poor man ter hav. But when it comes ter gittin' over the ground—Land o' Goshen! how the thing will git up an' dust."

"Very true," Hendershot answered.

"Member distinctly one case that 'curred under my puusonal observation. I was in Chicken Bar when the roughs riz up an' captered the town. We piled all the honist folks onter a train, give the engine its breakfast, an' then away we went at sech speed that the suction o' air raised lumps o' coal as big as your hat right up through the flue, or whatever they call the chimney that lets off the smoke."

"All looked favor'ble, but we hadn't been long 'way when we seen another train in pursuit. The rioters had coaled up and was a-comin' fur us so fast that at times their 'bull train made jumps an' didn't te'ch a rail fur fifty foot."

"I never seen a race so exciting as that before or sence. Our speed was sech that we tore up the ground egregiously, an' sent bowlders flyin' through the air incessant, but in spite o' that t'other train gained on us. The women an' children in our cars was screechin' pitiful, an' they shed so many tears, the weather bein' cold enough ter freeze the tears, they filled the 'bull train with hail-stones, an' we had ter keep shovelin' 'em out o' the winders, so as ter carry no unnec'sary load."

"Colonel Jiptrack an' I stood on the platform o' the rear car."

"They're still a-gainin', sez he."

"They be that, sez I."

"I'mafeerd we're gone up," sez he.

"I'm feerd we will go up later," sez I.

"I ain't prepared," sez be, mournfully.

"Ez a starter, you might hand me back the dollar you owe me," sez I.

"I'll do it," sez he, an' he did.

"Next," sez I, "smash yer whisky-bottle ag'in' the car."

"He started an' grew pale 'round the mouth."

"That's too sweepin' a reform," sez he; "but

ter ease my conscience a bit, I'll pour the whisky out."

"With that, he tipped up the bottle an' poured the hull half-pint down his throat—down the *inside*, mind ye—but jest as the last on't disappeared, he dropped the bottle, p'inted back an' give a yell.

"I'll be hanged ef I ever got the jim-jams so quick afore!" sez he, shakin' like a leaf.

"But it wa'n't that, Bronx, fur as I looked I seen that the steel rails o' the road had ketched fire behind our train, an' was blazin' like pitch. Yes, sir, it's a fact that we went so fast we'd set the rails on fire, an' they all burnt up before our pursuers got thar, and their train was wrecked. We escaped, an' then the colonel wanted ter borer that dollar back ter treat the crowd, but he didn't git it. It was an egregious tight squeeze, but our engine brung us through all right."

Just as this veracious story was concluded, they emerged from a timber-belt, and saw the hills only a short distance ahead.

"Git up, Remorse," said Yank to his horse. "Ef you ain't lost the power o' hearin', b'ar in mind that our camp is yender, an' swing yer legs in 'arnist."

Their pace was quickened; they soon reached the base of the hills and went into camp. The horses were given their liberty, and the men began to prepare supper.

Each one of the trio was well worthy of earnest attention, and from their cool, resolute air, they appeared to be men capable of successfully dealing with any danger.

He who seemed to be the leader was named Yank Yellowbird. He was probably forty-five or more years of age, but he bore his years well; his flaxen hair and light hued beard being without a perceptible thread of gray. His face was fearless, kind, honest and good-humored of expression, but no stretch of fancy could make it handsome. His small eyes, his prominent nose, and his sparse beard were all against good-looks; but it was a face which would at once create a good impression, and when the man was thoroughly known, that face would grow attractive to a beholder.

His dress, manner and weapons were those of a veteran borderman, though his rifle, which was very long, was old-fashioned, and his garments hung on his slender, yet muscular frame with singular looseness. He had not an ounce of superfluous flesh, but looked as hardy as some particularly rough knot.

Bronx Hendershot had not yet seen his thirtieth year. He was a man of medium size, but very muscular. He had a bold, manly, intelligent and engaging face, albeit it was grave of expression, and seemed to be one accustomed to Western life.

The young Indian was probably twenty years old. His slender form was well proportioned, and gave promise of strength and suppleness which would make him a bad opponent in a fight. He was of the Modoc tribe and was named Trail-Lifter, though sometimes called Still Tongue, a name which, Yank explained, had been given him because he was a mute.

For some time he had been Yank's constant companion. Why they went together no one knew, for they seemed a strange pair, but they were devoted to each other, and the mountaineer never tired of sounding the mute Modoc's praises. They had a sign language, by means of which they conversed, and seemed to have a perfect understanding.

Trail-Lifter was a handsome Indian. He had a singularly regular, alert face, and his black, flashing eyes had a wild beauty wholly their own. He seemed born for a warrior, yet he followed the fortunes of Yank Yellowbird, who liked peace, and never darkened his record with any dishonorable act.

The trio had just finished their supper, when Bronx saw Yank suddenly raise his head and look fixedly through the gathering gloom, while at the same moment a low, peculiar whistle sounded from Trail-Lifter's lips—a sound which the Modoc's affliction of speech did not prevent his making, and which always served to call attention.

The young Indian was pointing toward the higher land, and Bronx saw a human figure approaching.

Yank lifted his long rifle and laid it across his knees, but did not seem impressed with the idea that the unknown was to be regarded as hostile. His advance was so peculiar that it suggested that he was intoxicated, or worse. He walked slowly, and with a perceptible stagger.

When he reached the light of the fire he proved to be a man of middle age, roughly dressed and very pale. Bronx decided at once that his was not a bad face.

Reaching the fire the man dropped, rather than sat, upon a convenient boulder. Then his gaze wandered weakly, uncertainly to his new companions.

Yank broke the silence.

"Mister," said he, "it strikes me you're in some egregious fix."

"I am a dyin' man," was the hoarse reply.

"Not so bad as that, I hope. What's the rumpus?"

"I've got a bullet in hyar," and the stranger

touched his side, "an' it's eatin' the life out o' me."

"That so? Then you've come ter the right shop. I ain't no doctor, but gunshot wounnds, epidemics an' sech tribulations an' distresses are right in my line. Whip off yer coat an' let me see the hurt."

Yank arose, but the stranger motioned him back.

"No," he answered, in the same hoarse voice; "all the doctors in the world couldn't save me. I've seen ter the wound an' done all that can be done. From the time the bullet went in thar I was a doomed man, an' the eend is mighty near now. Don't trouble yerself about it, but— Be you honist men?"

The question was abruptly asked, and a trace of fire appeared in the man's dull eyes.

"I consait we be," Yank replied.

"Then thar is one thing you kin do."

"What's that?"

"Revenge me, an' save the wronged an' helpless."

The mountaineer's gaze dwelt gravely upon the face of the stranger.

"Who's be'n wronged?" he asked.

"Did you ever hear o' Dan City?"

"Think I hev. It's a town some twenty mile west, whar the Mormons rule as bosses o' the business, so ter say."

"Do ye know more about it?"

"Can't say I do."

"I wish I could say as much. A week ago I entered the employ o' them men. My name is Ike Green, an' I hev been a hunter an' wanderer. One day I met Tobe Moss, an old friend o' mine, an' a wal-known guide."

"To be sure; I've heerd on him," Yank replied.

"Tobe told me he had been hired ter guide a party o' Mormon converts ter Dan City, an' that Lovering an' Hicks, the big men o' Dan City, wanted one more man, ter act as assistant hunter. I took the job an' went along. Strangers, I ain't the strength ter talk, so I'll cut the story as short as I kin. Our party was attacked an' wrecked on the way. I was shot down outside the camp an' didn't see all, but thar was more shootin', an' I s'pose Tobe Moss an' many others was killed."

"The atrocious insex!" muttered Yank Yellowbird, grasping his rifle tighter.

"Them who did the massacreein' was white men, an' I heerd some talk nigh me when it was all over that let me onter a part o' their motive. Somebody in Dan City was afeerd ter hev them emigrants reach thar, fur thar was one o' them who knew too much. His name was Erik Dahlgren, an' he was a Swede, an' a right fine feller, too."

The speaker paused to take a drink of water which Bronx handed him. Then he continued:

"The attack was made ter kill Dahlgren, an' steal his two pretty da'rters, Lovis an' Inza. The poor, unfortinit gals was wanted by some o' the dignitaries o' Dan City—very likely by Lovering an' Hicks. The men I heerd say all this walked away, an' I fainted fur loss o' blood. When I come to, everybody, dead an' alive, was gone, an' the wagons an' what was in 'em had been burned. I don't know the fate o' any member o' the emigrant party, an' I sha'n't live ter learn it, but you see now why I asked ef you was honest men. A great wrong has been done, an' ef you are men you will see that jestice overtakes the guilty!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MARSHAL OF DAN CITY.

The wounded man had spoken with an effort, and with frequent pauses. His voice was low and weak, and they were prepared to believe that he was near the end of life. His companions had listened attentively, and Yank Yellowbird showed manifest disturbance.

As the narrator made the last pause, the mountaineer smote the breech of his rifle.

"It's a wonder," he declared, "that the good Lord kin take any int'rest in a world that has so many atrocious insex in it, by hurley!"

"Stranger," asked Green, looking closely at the veteran, "what's your name?"

"I'm plain Yank Yellowbird."

"I've heerd o' you!" returned Green, with transient energy, while his dull eyes lighted.

"Hope you never heerd no evil on me. Ef thar is any one thing the Yellowbirds pride theirselves on, it's their records. Nothin' wu'ss than orchard-robbin', or water-million pilferin', is known ag'in any on 'em; an' then only when the yoothful Yellowbirds wa'n't full-fledged. We trace our pedigree cl'ar back ter Adam Yellowbird, who married Eve Smith an' lived at Eden City, an' it would go furder only Adam's father lost the fam'ly records while crossin' the Red Sea in a canoe."

"You are the man of all other ter undertake this work," asserted Green.

"What d'ye want me ter do?"

"Look up the case o' them emigrants, an' above all, ter save them two gals, Lovis an' Inza Dahlgren."

Yank stroked his sparse beard meditatively.

"I've a good mind ter do it, by hurley!" he said.

"You couldn't work in a better cause."

Yank glanced at Bronx Hendershot.

"I am with you, Nevermiss," the young man replied.

"Bear in mind," added Green, "that great peril will menace ye at ev'ry step. Dan City is a hard place, an' Hicks an' Lovering rule thar absolutely."

"Give me my two good frien's, hyar, an' I kin laugh at 'em. Bronx an' Still Tongue are fighters, they be: though I ain't no great at it myself. I'm awfully a'flicted with the new-rolgy, an' my left foot is a coward. I was cut out fur a hero, I do b'lieve, but as I said afore my left foot is a weak sister, an' it will git skeered an' run. I was once in a three days' fight with the Apaches, an' the only way I kept the weak sister anywhar nigh me was ter tie it ter a tree. An' egregious coward is my left foot."

"Your eccentricities an' heroism are ekully wal known," asserted Green. "Among the Injins you are known as 'Nevermiss,' an' they didn't give ye the name 'thout cause. But promise me ter look arter this matter!"

"We will," Yank replied. "I'm 'specially int'rested in the case of them gals—Lovis an' Inza, I b'lieve ye called 'em. I always was partial ter pooty females, an' I reckon Bronx Hendershot has an eye in his head. Yes, we'll look inter it."

"Look out fur Lovering an' Hicks."

"To be sure, but we're goin' right inter their town, an' we go with fire in our eyes. Ef it shoots out an' knocks over a few regiments o' the atrocious insex, they hev only themselves ter thank."

Green expressed his thanks warmly, and, now that the point was settled, seemed to lose almost the last vestige of strength. He was made as comfortable as possible on the blankets of the other men, and then he lay at the foot of the hills while his life ebbed away.

Bronx Hendershot found the scene singularly impressive. He had seen men die before, but the story he had heard, the promise they had given, and their peculiarly grim surroundings made him grave and thoughtful to an extreme.

The end came about midnight.

The remainder of the night the survivors slept as much as possible. In the morning they hollowed as suitable a grave as their means would admit, and Green's body was deposited therein.

When it was done the trio gathered at the camp.

"We hev made a promise," observed Yank.

"Which, of course, we shall keep," added Bronx.

"To be sure. Our way is toward Dan City. From what Green said, we know what ter expect—a rough town, ruled over by two men who are the big toads in the puddle. Moreover, they are Mormons, while we are cats o' a different color, so ter say. As a rule I pity Mormons, fur their wives must make an egregious amount o' tribulations fur them; but this partic'lar lot at Dan City we must regard simply as men who are mean critters, and deal thusly with them."

"In plain words, we go as their enemies, regardless of odds."

"Yes, yes; we can't pity their weakness, an' ef we find they hev them gals thar, we'll hev ter wallop the atrocious insex. Lovis an' Inza! Sech was the names of the pooty females. Fix 'em in yer mind, lad."

At this moment Trail-Lifter called attention with his whistle, and his fingers began to work over and about each other rapidly. Each motion was a word-sign familiar to Yank, and partially understood by Bronx, and in this way the mute Modoc always communicated his ideas.

Nevermiss nodded quickly at the close of the silent communication.

"The Injun advises that we be off, an' I reckon he is right. These mountains ain't the safest place in Utah. Ef what we've previously heerd about Dan City is true thar is a gang there o' the old, reg'lar Danite order, led by one Hurlforth—an' egregious funny name, by burley!—who do what the head men tell 'em, an' don't scroople ter take human life. We may meet 'em in the hills, an' the sooner we go, the less the chance on't. Ef we do meet 'em though, an' they're on the fight, they'll git licked out o' their moccasins, by hurley!"

This assertion was not made in a boasting or sanguinary way. Indeed, Yank's manner was nearly always mild, even as it was quiet, unostentatious and honest. Possessing a strong sense of the humorous side of life, he so covered all that he said and did with quaint conceits, that he would have been classed by many as the most inoffensive of men.

So he was, ordinarily, and no one loved peace and harmony more than he, but he was always ready to aid the weak and persecuted, and when decisive action became necessary, there were few men who could stand before him.

In battle he was a hurricane, and evil-minded men, whether white or red, feared and hated him; but a truer friend, or more honest man, was not to be found.

The journey was renewed; they went on steadily through the day; and a short time before nightfall Dan City was reached.

The town was built partly on the final slope of

the ridge, and partly on the prairie below, which stretched away toward the southwest, green, fertile and well-cultivated. Between this prairie and the ridge the people had a variety of scenery, for the ridge was as wild as the prairie was fair.

Dan City was a Mormon town, but rumor said that it was not in the best of standing. Some disagreement with those higher in authority had led to a partial estrangement, though Lovering and Hicks, who ruled Dan City, were careful not to get wholly outside the fold. They were covetous of power, and headstrong, but they wanted to be so situated that they could call on their brethren for aid if it was needed.

Yank, Bronx and Trail-Lifter rode into the village, and when a sign told them of the presence of a hotel, they put up there. They would have preferred a hut beyond the limits of the village itself, except for one thing.

They were there to get trace of Louis and Inza Dahlgren, and it was believed that the gossip of hotel idlers might give them a clew.

The house was one which outwardly resembled other hotels in places of like size, and as they did not seem to attract any attention, they began to hope that they would be able to enter upon their career in the town in a very quiet manner, which was something they were anxious to do.

This delusive calm lasted for some hours, and they began to think that Dan City was not so bad a place as it was represented, but they were destined to be enlightened.

The three were sitting together, about nine o'clock, when a single man entered, and, without any pause, walked toward them. He was an impressive-looking person. Tall and powerfully built, he had a degree of muscle which would naturally command respect, but it was his face which would attract and hold attention.

His hair and beard, both of which were long, were of the deepest black imaginable, while his complexion was singularly pale for one exposed to wind and sun as he must be. It was a singular pallor, too, and did not seem to arise from lack of health, but rather to a natural peculiarity. Its contrast to his hair and beard was singular and almost startling. His eyes were deep-set and large, while the ponderous brows were tipped with a hirsute growth of remarkable length.

This strange-looking man approached the trio and sat down near them in silence, while his expression was as fixed and grim as that of a sphinx. Once seated, he broke the silence in an abrupt way:

"My name," he said, "is Hurlforth, and I am the Marshal of Dan City. I have come to inquire who you are."

His manner was not particularly menacing, but both Yank and Bronx saw that they were marked as men who might not be wanted in Dan City. The mountaineer, however, preserved his usual calmness.

"I haven't no keerd with me," he benignly replied, "but I don't mind sayin' that my name is Yank Yellowbird. Don't mix me with others o' like name, Canary, Hawk, or Robin, for instance. I'm one o' the 'riginal Yellowbirds, an' I try ter uphold the honor o' the fam'ly pedigree. My partners hyar are Bronx Hendershot, a man with white skin an' clean record, an' Trail-Lifter, a Modoc o' uncommon moral bravery an' genius."

"What has brought you to Dan City?" abruptly asked Hurlforth, whose gaze had rested on Yank's face with a cold, fixed survey.

"We're travelin'."

"To where?"

"Nowhar an' everywhar. We're nomads an' rovers, sight-seers an' time-killers. We're liable ter pitch our tent—or should be ef we had a tent—five hundred miles away a fortnight hence. The Yellowbirds always was egregious wanderers."

"Are you Mormons or Gentiles?"

"We're sorter settin' on the fence. Can't say we're Mormons, 'cause we ain't wal stocked up with wives, though ef we'd taken all that has proposed ter us, we'd have a regular swarm on 'em, by hurley! Nigh about ev'ry town we stop at we are besought in matrimony. I s'pose it is on account o' our good looks," and Yank stroked his sparse beard complacently.

"Gentiles," pursued Hurlforth, "are not wanted in Dan City."

"Wal, ef we settle we'll prescribe ter the rools an' creeds o' the Mormon faith. It's one peculiarity o' the Yellowbirds that they kin adapt themselves to any kind o' sarcumstances. Member distinctly when I attended a ball in St. Louis once, an' was so pestered by the poity gals ter dance that I had ter go in, though I had never shook a foot afore in my nat'r'l life—none o' the Yellowbirds ever did seem ter be made for jumpin'-jacks. On this 'casion I went in, hows'ever, an' I did right wal considerin' I was a new hand at it. What sp'ised me most was ter see how awk'ard the feminines was with their skirts. They kept swingin' 'em around under my feet, an' actooally throwed me down two or three times when I stepped on 'em; but I didn't git all the damage. The dresses got egregiously torn ev'ry time they got

under my feet, an' I could see by the way the gals looked at me that they was mad as hurley at their awkwardness. The falls I got broosed the skin off o' one knee an' both elbows, an' I's laid up fur repairs nigh a week, but I had piles o' fur n' t'standin', an' I didn't blame the gals a bit."

A transient smile appeared on Bronx's face, but grim Hurlforth did not change expression.

"This is not to the point," he replied. "I want to caution you to conduct yourself circumspectly while you are in Dan City."

"To be sure we shall," serenely replied Yank.

"You must not interfere with anybody's affairs."

"Not muez, we won't."

"If you do, look out for me."

"That's all right, mister, but I can't see why you need ter preach a sermon on't, by hurley!"

"We tolerate no molestation of the faithful."

"Land o' Goshen! you needn't be afeerd o' me. I am a great victim o' newrolgy, which hez so warped my j'nts that I ain't at all dangerous when I try ter be."

Hurlforth abruptly arose.

"A word to the wise is sufficient," he observed. "Mind your own business, and you will have no trouble at Dan City; interfere with the chosen people, and you will be dealt with in a severe and permanent way!"

With this suggestive remark the marshal strode out of the room. He left them in an uncomfortable mood. It was clear that they were already objects of suspicion, and danger would hover over them every moment they remained at Dan City.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTY IN THE SADDLE.

NORTHWARD from Dan City a canyon extended for at least three-quarters of a mile. It was about one hundred feet wide, and the rocky walls which hemmed it in were, on an average, of a height nearly equal to its width. The bottom of the gulch was almost as smooth as a road, except where, near the cliffs, a boulder had fallen down at intervals.

A few minutes' walk from the village, a hut nestled against the side of the eastern cliff. It was the only human edifice ever built in Griffin Gulch, so far as was known in Dan City, and even that had not been there over a week.

The tenant was a single man—a wild, handsome, dashing fellow who had suddenly appeared and located in this strange way. Hurlforth had duly interviewed him. The unknown talked rapidly, pleasantly, and seemed to be very communicative, while he really told almost nothing.

He gave his name as Gold Gauntlet, and seemed to seriously consider the idea of casting his fortunes with the Mormons of Dan City. He asked time for consideration, however, and Hurlforth, who set him down as a wild, reckless adventurer, readily agreed to the proposal.

The stronger the town could make itself, the better, and the astute "marshal" saw that Gold Gauntlet would be a most valuable man if it ever came to a matter of war at the village.

Several days passed, but no more was known about the man. He never came to the village, and when Hurlforth went to the hut, as he had done twice—once in the company of his illustrious superior, Joseph Lovering—he had found no trace of Gold Gauntlet. The man had been seen, however. Mounted on his black horse he was often observed riding through the gulches and over the prairie, and he had made a reputation as the wildest dare-devil ever seen in the saddle at Dan City.

The black horse was very fleet-footed, and Gold Gauntlet rode him at a tremendous pace. His feats of horsemanship had made him the talk of the town.

Notwithstanding this, no more was known of him as the days went by, and the general drift of opinion was against him. Such a rattle-pated fellow as he appeared to be was not wanted there unless he would make himself useful, and this he could not do merely by galloping about the country like Tam O'Shanter.

On the day after the arrival of Yank and his companions, a single rider went forward in the gulch until a point was reached where the hut was visible. There she checked her horse—her horse, because the rider was a young lady.

More than this she was a beautiful young lady. Somewhat above the average of her sex in height, she had a willowy, slender, but well-developed, form; and only the most critical observer would have suspected that her garments were made in Dan City. Certainly, they were of remarkable good taste for the remote region where she lived. Her face was one to attract and interest whoever saw it, and an abundance of golden hair gave her a queenly air when taken in connection with her form.

This was Isabel Lovering, and she was the sister of Joseph Lovering, so often mentioned as one of the rulers of Dan City.

Isabel had seen Gold Gauntlet but once, though she had often heard of him. What she heard had aroused all her curiosity, and when by chance she saw him riding recklessly across the prairie, the man persisted in haunting her mind. True, he did not even know that such a person

as she existed, but he was in her mind almost continually, nevertheless.

The girl had always been accustomed to have her own way since she joined her brother at Dan City. She had done some wise, and some willful things. She had declined the honor of marrying several Mormons, who presented themselves as candidates for her hand; had affiliated with no sect, creed or clique; and had pursued such an independent course that some of the other women of Dan City were shocked—at least so they said.

Isabel, hearing of this, smiled calmly. They were women who had surrendered their freedom for the uncertain happiness of being one of several wives.

She preferred to remain her own mistress.

On this occasion she paused in the gulch only a few seconds. Then she touched her horse lightly with the whip, and approached the hut at an easy gallop.

She saw no sign of life until she had nearly reached the place. Then a man came out—it was Gold Gauntlet, himself.

He had lost no part of his dashing, manly beauty since the day when he looked upon the picture-rocks. Instead, he made himself neater, and looked the gallant cavalier to perfection.

Isabel had come to a halt only a few feet away, and now sat looking at him closely. Her manner was not brazen, if her course was bold, and he read her expression closely enough to feel sure that he was being gazed at very much as though he had been some museum curiosity.

As the girl said nothing, he politely removed his hat and bowed gracefully.

"Good-morning, miss," he said, easily.

"Good-morning, sir."

"I am happy to see you at my mansion, but as it is an unfinished affair, I can't very well ask you in."

"I did not come to see your residence, sir."

"No?"

"No; I came to look at you."

"To look at me?"

"Exactly."

"I am honored, really, but I can't see where your share of the pleasure comes in."

"I have heard you spoken of a good deal in Dan City, where you are regarded as a man considerably out of the usual order of men; and while the others have been idly talking, I thought I would go a step further, beard the lion in his den, and see just what you are like!"

Isabel made this statement with great frankness, and though a slight smile of amusement hovered over her face, she also seemed to be in earnest. Gold Gauntlet's handsome eyes suddenly sparkled.

"I thank the impulse that sent you here," he promptly answered.

"Really, are you so willing to be stared at?"

"I am when the gazer is a beautiful girl, and—I can return her regard."

"Ah! but I didn't come to be looked at."

"True, but if you will allow me the privilege, I shall consider myself the most fortunate of men!"

Isabel's face flushed a little; under this outwardly idle banter she detected a current of something more, and she began to realize that she had been rash and impulsive to an extreme. Feeling her cheeks flush, she grew angry at herself because it was so.

"You are easily made happy," she retorted, "but then, I remember they say at the village that you are a rattle-pate."

"I know one person who does not think so," Gold Gauntlet coolly replied.

"Who?"

"Yourself!"

The flush in the girl's face grew more apparent.

"You are talking nonsense," she said, trying to be stern, "and no one in Dan City would dare to address me thus. I am inclined to forgive you, since you are a stranger, but please to bear in mind what you evidently don't know—that I am Miss Lovering, sister of Joseph Lovering, one of the rulers of Dan City."

She had made the announcement ponderously, hoping to crush this presumptuous fellow, and it certainly had as much effect as she had anticipated. He started back, changed expression perceptibly, and remained looking at her blankly. Surprise if not dismay, was expressed on his face.

Isabel enjoyed her triumph, but it was brief. Gold Gauntlet recovered, smiled and bowed.

"I shall soon call on Mr. Joseph Lovering," he said.

"For what reason?"

"Having met his sister, I deem it good to know him. I am no longer indifferent to the attractions of Dan City—or, at least, to one of them—and shall no longer turn a deaf ear to the invitations I have received. Your brother has asked me to his house—you will soon see me there, Miss Lovering."

"I don't know whether I shall or not!" retorted Isabel.

"Oh! I shall certainly call."

"That is not saying that you will see me."

"Wouldn't you appear to welcome me?"

"I think not—I am sure I should not."

"Then I shall call for you. Why not? It

will be to see you that I go. I don't care a picanune for your brother and all the rest of Dan City; it is to you that I bow!"

"Mr. Gold Gauntlet, or whatever your name is," answered Isabel, severely, "it seems to me that you have passed the limits of idle flattery, and are now insulting me. I can't complain; my unmaidenly recklessness in coming here in this way is to blame for all; but I am sorry that I have found you so little of a gentleman."

She tightened the rein and was about to turn her horse, but Gold Gauntlet laid one of his masked hands upon that side of the rein nearest him.

"No, no, Miss Lovering," he said, earnestly. "You are mistaken; you wrong me. Far be it from me to scoff at any lady; far be it from me to cause you a moment's pain. I have said nothing that could be construed into an insult to you. Heaven forbid! I am a plain, matter-of-fact man, Miss Lovering, prone to say just what is in my mind, and this way have led me to say something indiscreet."

"Possibly it did."

Isabel answered almost mechanically. She was looking down into the man's handsome face, and had almost forgotten that she was angry at him. She had found more of a curiosity than she had expected, but the effect upon her was wholly unexpected.

"Then I apologize," Gold Gauntlet gravely continued. "I would not offend you for a king's ransom. I have met you; I admire you. Don't say that you are my enemy!"

Those strangely attractive eyes looked up into her own, and the adventurer's voice was gentle and persuasive.

"I feel that I am more to blame than you, so I can hardly reprove you in a very strong way."

"Now I thank you," exclaimed Gold Gauntlet, a swift change coming to his face; it was as though he had, indeed, received great good news. "Let me ask, however, that you will not reprove yourself for coming here, for I hold this to be the happiest moment of my life."

"Now you are venturing on dangerous ground again."

"How can I help it?" he passionately asked. "How can any one look upon you without worshiping you."

"Isabel released the rein from his light hold by a quick, angry movement.

"Enough!" she exclaimed; "I see that you are determined to insult me. I will not talk with you longer; I will never speak with you again."

"You forget that I am going to call upon you," Gold Gauntlet calmly returned.

"You will not see me."

"I shall ask for you."

"I will not come."

The girl had reined her horse half-way around, but she now paused to look at him defiantly. He smiled in a very self-possessed way.

"Pardon me, but you labor under a mistake, Miss Lovering. From the moment I first saw you I felt that I had met the woman destined by fate to be my wife. We can't defy fate, Miss Lovering."

"How dare you say that!" cried Isabel, her face flushed with anger.

"I speak like an oracle; believe me, this is no idle talk. You and I were created for each other. Fate has brought us together; fate will unite us, whether we will or not."

He made this remarkable declaration with an air of the most apparent candor, but it stung Isabel Lovering to the quick. She felt that she hated this presumptuous man of the gulch, and she longed to secure revenge.

CHAPTER V.

SCALPING-KNIFE.

GOLD GAUNTLET saw the disdainful, angry look on Isabel's face, but his confident air did not change.

"When I go to your brother's house," he added, "I shall appear as your suitor. True, I may not say so to Joseph Lovering, but you will understand when we meet."

"You are at liberty to visit my brother as soon as you choose," she haughtily replied, "but you will not meet me. I will not see you."

"Suppose that Joseph sends for you?"

Isabel drew her patrician figure more erect.

"Ask him to do so if you will; you will see how I obey. Obey! I obey no one, least of all a madcap unknown who hides his identity under the sobriquet of Gold Gauntlet; who dresses like a dandy; who shows no regard for good manners, and is plainly a person of very low life."

"Rather a severe arraignment," replied he, carelessly, "but it only shows the necessity of what I have proposed. You must know me better, see how you are in error, and learn to like me."

"Enough!" exclaimed Isabel, in a voice which was tremulous with other emotion than anger. "I will remain no longer to listen to you; I wonder that I have stayed so long. More than this, I have to-day learned a lesson. Common sense should have kept me from making this visit; it did not, but my experience will keep me from repeating it."

Once more she pulled at the rein, this time so

sharply that her horse half-reared and then swung around.

"Wait one moment," requested Gold Gauntlet.

Not a word did she answer, and in a moment more her horse was in retreat, urged by a non-to-gentle blow.

"To-morrow!"

The words floated after her, and though she did not turn her head, they brought another flush to her face. Then she suddenly burst into tears.

"Why—why was I so mad?" she thought, bitterly. "No wonder this reckless man was emboldened to use insolent language to me; I outraged every sense of propriety by going there as I did. I don't know why I did it—but I know the result. As for his threats, let him persecute me if he dares!"

The flow of tears suddenly ceased; she threw back her head, and her eyes sparkled in a way impressive to behold.

"Let him annoy me if he dares!" she said, aloud.

At that moment Gold Gauntlet was standing by his hut, his arms folded across his broad chest, gazing after her. His face was no longer careless; it had grown dark and stern, with just a suspicion of triumph in its expression. He had devoted some little time to admiration as she rode away, but other thoughts were crowding forward for notice.

"How strange that she is Joseph Lovering's sister!" he muttered. "I never knew that there was a woman in the case, but this fact is a God-send to me. My plans of revenge are all changed, and now I see a way which will be scientific and overwhelming. I must strike Joseph Lovering through this girl; she must be sacrificed to ruin and destroy him—to break his heart."

The significance of the last words made him pause for a moment.

"Yes," he added, "and her own will break, too. It seems a trifle hard, but there is no other way to get at Joseph. I can prove nothing against him, and it is folly to talk of law. I must repay him in his own coin, and I see the way clear if he loves his sister. Loves her! By Heavens! it is impossible that he should do otherwise. That girl is a queen among women!"

He began to pace back and forth before the hut, an uneasy look on his face.

"This is an admirable piece of rascality, and I ought to be shot for it. I, who used to talk about the inestimable necessity of honor, am contemplating the sacrifice of an innocent girl to get my revenge on her brother. Villainous! But wait, wait; I can't afford to be hypocritical; the work must go on. Isabel, you are beautiful and charming, but I am doomed to be your evil genius; I am doomed to break your heart!"

A peculiar look swept over his face, but at that moment his ever-watchful gaze detected something which turned his thoughts away from himself.

A man was coming down the gulch at a peculiar gait. Gold Gauntlet at first thought that he was intoxicated, but abandoned the idea as the man came nearer. He was an ill-dressed, rough-looking person; his garments were in rags, and only held together by means of strings which drew together, but did not mend the rents; and his hair and beard were in a state of disorder which could hardly be excelled.

He did not seem to notice Gold Gauntlet until quite near. When he did he came to a stop, and looked at him as though afraid to advance further.

"Good-evening, neighbor," said the young man, in a friendly way.

The stranger muttered something Gold Gauntlet did not distinctly hear.

"Come this way," the latter directed.

The unknown obeyed, and Gold Gauntlet was impressed by the appearance of his face. It was not one of great intelligence, and bore an uncertain, timid, half-stupid expression.

"We shall all starve!"

This remarkable speech was made in a hoarse voice, and the speaker seemed inclined to take to his heels and make off.

"Not a bit of it," Gold Gauntlet answered.

"The way is dark," said the man, timidly.

"Not so very dark."

"There is nothin' to eat in these rocks."

"Bless you! if your stomach is in need, I can help you out. You shall have all you want. Wait a second."

The young man went into the hut, and, returning, set before his new acquaintance a supply of food. The latter still looked at him as though in doubt, but when bluffed bidden to "fall to," he obeyed, and began to eat with the relish of a starving man, taking huge bites, and swallowing the food when only half-masticated.

For awhile he was utterly oblivious to all else, but after a few minutes he began to steal frequent glances at Gold Gauntlet, and his manner was as timid as ever.

Gold Gauntlet took no great interest in him, supposing him some vagabond of the town, but when the repast was finished, he again broke the silence:

"What's your name, my good man?"

"Scalping-Knife!"

Laconically enough the man answered, and his hand disappeared in his ragged coat; he fumbled about for a moment, and then brought out a long-bladed knife.

"Who can pick the lock?" he muttered, looking at Gold Gauntlet wistfully.

"What lock?" the latter asked.

"The way is dark."

With this vague observation the man dropped his head and began to draw lines and circles in the sand with his knife. Gold Gauntlet watched him in pitying silence. The man seemed only half-witted, and conversation with him would be useless; he had ministered to his chief want by feeding him.

The man's helplessness aroused his pity, however, and he fell into deep thought which only ended when the stranger ceased work.

"Scalping-Knife" was looking at him with mournful and earnest attention, and when he saw that he was observed in return, he pointed with his knife to the ground and muttered:

"The picture on the rock!"

Gold Gauntlet started. He had not forgotten the mysterious signs he had seen on his way to Dan City, and these words forcibly recalled it.

One moment he was attentive; then he shrugged his shoulders as he remembered the speaker's evident mental state. Scalping-Knife still regarded him earnestly, however, and still pointed to the ground, so Gold Gauntlet changed his position and looked at what he had thought the idle marking of the ground.

No sooner had he done this than he became all attention and interest.

With the point of his knife the vagabond had drawn in the sand a very fair copy of the strange picture of the rock. There was the kneeling man, the flying lasso and the anchor.

Probably if Gold Gauntlet had never seen that other picture, he would have seen nothing distinct in this one, but as it was, the likeness was startling.

"What does that mean?" the young man demanded.

"Scalping-Knife!" was the listlessly reply.

Gold Gauntlet comprehended that when the stranger first used these words he had not intended to claim them as his name, but the master of the hut saw fit to cling to the idea.

"Well, Mr. Scalping-Knife, what about this picture of yours?"

"Who can pick the lock?" muttered the vagabond, and his regard became more earnest and mournful.

"Just what I want to know. Why did you make that drawing? What does it mean?"

Scalping-Knife started, looked frightened again, but said nothing.

"What about the picture on the rocks?" resumed Gold Gauntlet.

"The water rolls deep!" the stranger uttered, in his mournful, half-frightened way.

He arose, watching Gold Gauntlet closely, and the latter, annoyed at being on the threshold of a solution of the mystery only to be baffled, as it seemed, grasped the man's arm forcibly.

"Come, gather your wits and speak out!" he sternly ordered.

Scalping-Knife uttered a startled cry. Gold Gauntlet's severe grasp and imperious words had alarmed him afresh, and he trembled in every limb. Not a word did he speak, however.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH IS THE "SHARPER?"

CONFIDENT that he could gain no information by proceeding gently, Gold Gauntlet shook the vagabond with increased roughness.

"Open your mouth and talk!" he ordered. "I want to learn what you know about the picture rocks. Don't force me to tear you to pieces to get the information. Speak out, I say!"

And once more his strong grasp shook the unknown like a leaf in the wind.

Scalping-Knife looked the picture of terror, but if he lacked courage to resent such usage, he had a way to avoid it. With a sudden movement he broke Gold Gauntlet's hold, and then, turning, he dashed away up the gulch like a frightened deer. If he had been racing for his life he could not have gone faster.

Gold Gauntlet did not pursue. Seeing that the man had evaded him, he shrugged his shoulders philosophically.

"Let him go! He's only some crazy, or foolish, fellow, and not worth my time. And yet—yet— He plainly knows something about the picture rock. This work of his in the sand is a good copy, considering his means. Can it be that he became crazy through events connected with that mystery so unsatisfactorily hinted at by the picture on the rock?"

Scalping-Knife had disappeared, but for some moments the younger man stood in deep thought. Then he suddenly aroused.

"Bah! why do I waste time over this affair? I have matters of more importance to occupy my time. I am going to see Joseph Lovering and his fair sister—yes, and his sister, for she is to be the means of my revenge. Little will Joseph suspect what a disturbing element is at

hand when I call upon him. I will talk very fair and favorable—and then for revenge!"

Turning abruptly, he went inside the hut. From out of a corner he produced a violin, and, sitting down, began to play.

This man had other peculiarities than going under the strange name of "Gold Gauntlet."

A physiognomist, looking critically at his face, would have said that he was a practical man of very strong will. It seemed contrary to all laws of nature for him to dress like a dandy, ride about the country like a madman, and play the violin in this wild gulch of Utah.

Two years before he had never worn long hair, dressed in other than sober garments, ridden recklessly or played a stroke on a violin.

Circumstances may make a millionaire beg for a crust of bread; circumstances had made Gold Gauntlet what he now was. He had no taste for music, yet he had employed the best teachers of New York city to make him a good violinist.

When the work was done he came to Utah to play.

He was certainly very skillful. He played boldly, yet with excellent judgment, and the humble little hut became filled with melody which would have delighted fastidious ears. Two pieces were played; then he stopped short in the midst of the third, and a troubled look crossed his face.

"Was that a flaw?" he asked, aloud. "I feel almost sure that I did not wield the bow just right then!"

Considering that the only possible imperfection was an incorrect volume of sound on some one note, if anything—and even that was doubtful—his anxiety seemed strange; but he went over the suspected point again and again.

"That's better," he finally said. "Twas the first slip I've made in several weeks; pray Heaven it may be the last!"

Strange Gold Gauntlet! Why was he so anxious to play correctly—even with fastidious nicety—in that wild land of Utah? It was no idle desire, and it had the importance of a strong, fixed purpose. He would rather use the bow to perfection than find the richest mine in all the West.

Mysterious Gold Gauntlet!

Finally he put the violin carefully away, and then lay down, lighted his pipe and began smoking.

The day wore away. Minutes grew into hours; the sun went down, and night followed on its heels; then, in due time, Old Sol again appeared on the scene and conquered the field with all his usual glow and spirit.

Gold Gauntlet waited until the middle of the forenoon; then he secured his horse from the little valley where he had been grazing, and rode into Dan City. He went with speed and idle show; the thoughtful look was gone from his face, and he looked to be no more than the idle dare-devil the villagers believed him to be.

He drew up in front of Lovering's house with a good deal of flourish, sprung off and went to the door. He rapped, and a gray-haired old negro appeared.

"Young man," said Gold Gauntlet, airily, "is Joseph at home?"

"Mr. Joseph Lovering am in, sah," the aged servant replied, resentfully.

"Then tell him I want to see him."

And the visitor walked unceremoniously past the negro, entered the parlor and sat down with his hat still on his head. This disregard of form dumfounded the colored gentleman.

"What shall I tell him your name is, sah?" he asked, in a do-n-hearted way.

"Tell him nothing except what I directed, and tell him that at once. Why do you stand there staring like the man in the moon? My business is with Joe, not with you. Get thee hence, A. Jackson Berry!"

He knew the colored man's name, it seemed, and the old servitor went his way with a heavy heart. Mr. Berry did not love the West, and he never would while there was such a disregard of etiquette on all hands.

Joseph Lovering soon entered.

He was a man of twenty-five years, tall and very delicately built. His face was boyish, and smoothly shaven except for a straw-colored mustache of insignificant size. He was a pronounced blonde, his hair being very light of color, and his eyes a light blue. One would have said at first sight that he had a weak, expressionless face, but a closer scrutiny gave the impression that he was obstinate, if not reasonably firm; and under all was something which suggested that he might not always be scrupulously honest.

Gold Gauntlet had removed his hat, and he now arose politely.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lovering," he said.

"Good-morning, sir; I am pleased to see you."

Lovering gave the caller his hand, and seemed to feel all that he professed.

"I see that you know me."

"Oh! yes; you are the Gulch Gladiator, as somebody has named you—a tribute to your muscular form."

"I have somebody to thank."

"Pray sit down, Mr.—"

"Gold Gauntlet."

"A peculiar name."

"I am a peculiar man."

"We all have our individualities, as I may express it. You are a good man for the West, sir; so good that I hope we are to have the pleasure of writing you down a permanent citizen of Dan City."

"Then you'll let me into the fold?"

"With pleasure."

"Your city marshal, Hurlforth, called upon me, and I have been thinking the matter over ever since."

"I hope you have decided to remain."

"You shall hear my position. If I settle down I must become a genuine Mormon, I am told."

"A Dan City Mormon," Lovering amended. "We are not orthodox members of the great brotherhood. Mr. Hicks and I don't like to be little toads in a big puddle, as it were, so we barely keep in the limits of the fold, and proceed almost independently, as far as the Mormon church and everybody else is concerned."

"I see, and that suits me well," Gold Gauntlet replied. "What are Dan City's chances of growing to be a large place?"

"Very good."

"Why I ask is this: I have some money—about fifty thousand dollars—and when I settle down I want to place it where it will grow."

Lovering's eyes glittered with cupidity.

"Dan City is just the place. We can sell you a large tract of land at a merely nominal price, and it is sure to double in value in six months, treble in a year, and—"

He was going on with this flattering picture, but Gold Gauntlet interrupted in his most buoyant manner.

"I believe this is just the chance I want. I'm not a business man, but I believe Western land is the thing. You chuck in your money; the value increases; you come out rich. I haven't a head for business, but a fool can get rich on a rise in land."

Joseph Lovering was filled with exultation. He was an unscrupulous man; he wanted Gold Gauntlet's money at Dan City—wanted it there simply because he wanted to play a game of wits with the Gladiator, and transfer the money from that man's pocket to his own. Apparently, Gold Gauntlet was both ignorant of business and prudence; he seemed to have child-like simplicity; he would be a rare bird to pluck.

So thought Joseph, and he proceeded to draw a very roseate picture of Dan City and its future.

Gold Gauntlet listened, and seemed fully convinced.

"I shall lack one thing when I settle," he said, anon.

"What is that?"

"I haven't even one wife."

"There are fair young damsels in Dan City."

"I know it, and there is one who fills my heart and soul with admiration; one who is as beautiful as an angel; one to whom any man might be proud to bow the head, prince though he might be. Promise me this woman, and I cast my lot with Dan City from this hour."

"I promise—"

"Wait. You have not heard her name."

"It makes no difference; if she is unmarried, she shall be yours."

"Even if—"

"Even if it were my own sister!" declared Joseph, who plainly had no suspicion of the truth.

Gold Gauntlet arose.

"It is your sister!" he quietly said. "The girl I love and wish to marry is Isabel Lovering!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WHO LIKED MUSIC.

DESPITE his late confident assertion Joseph Lovering was surprised, and for a few moments he sat looking at Gold Gauntlet in silence.

"You wish to marry my sister?" he finally said, with a marked interrogative accent.

"I do."

The Gulch Gladiator spoke quietly, and leaned back in his chair in the most matter-of-fact way possible.

"Why, you have never spoken to her."

"Excuse me; I chanced to meet her; we conversed; she made my heart captive."

There was another silence. Joseph, despite his rather insipid face, had a quick mind. He was now thinking deeply. He loved Isabel, and that love was the one redeeming quality in his nature. For a while the good and evil struggled in his mind. Should he, to gratify his selfish plans and ambition, sacrifice her?—for he believed that it would be nothing less than sacrifice to give her to this reckless stranger.

Gold Gauntlet waited patiently for a reply.

"You have surprised me," said Joseph, at last, "but I am not inclined to recede from my promise. Isabel shall marry you!"

"She may object."

Joseph shrugged his shoulders.

"My will is law in Dan City."

"Then I rely upon you to help me."

"One word with you, though. Here in Dan

City woman does not have the liberty and power that she does in the East; she is kept in her proper place, as an inferior. Man is the ruler here; we overturn woman's petty whims, instead of humoring them. But Isabel is a fine girl; she is my sister; I love her. Misfortune to her would break my heart."

There was a tremor in Joseph's voice as he spoke.

"Believe me, every act of mine toward her shall be tempered by the knowledge of your love for her," replied Gold Gauntlet, with a depth of meaning Joseph did not suspect.

"I hope she will like you," Joseph continued, "and as woman's love is aroused merely by what pleases her eye, she ought to. I will call her!"

He rung the bell.

"Pray don't let her know that any visitor is here," said the Gladiator.

"It shall be as you say."

The colored man appeared; he was directed to request the presence of Miss Lovering in the parlor; he bowed very low and withdrew.

Joseph had something more to say, but Gold Gauntlet scarcely heard him; he was wondering what the coming interview would bring forth. Isabel had declared that she would not see him under any circumstances; that she would never speak to him again. Unless she had learned of his presence in the house, she was about to be entrapped into seeing him. What would be the result?

He expected a lively scene. He believed that she would sweep indignantly from the room, but if she did so he hoped to conquer her. He had made Joseph his ally, and with the glittering bait of fifty thousand dollars before his eyes, he would be a faithful one.

Isabel came. She entered the parlor in a manner which at once proved that she did not expect to find a caller there. A smile was on her face, but the abruptness with which it vanished when she saw who was there was startling.

Suddenly she came to a full stop, and her lovely face seemed to grow rigid.

"My sister, Miss Lovering; Mr. Gold Gauntlet," said Joseph, forgetting that the Gladiator had spoken of a previous meeting.

The visitor bowed low.

"Miss Lovering and I are not strangers," he observed.

Isabel said nothing, but her eyes flashed indignation upon Gold Gauntlet. Her face flushed, and then turned pale. She turned toward Joseph.

"Why didn't you inform me you had company?" she asked imperiously.

Joseph, surprised and confused, glanced at Gold Gauntlet.

"Am I to infer from that glance that this gentleman told you not to warn me?" she continued, quickly.

There was sarcasm in the way she uttered the word "gentleman," but the Gladiator remained unmoved.

"Such was the case, Miss Lovering," he replied; "I wanted to give you a little surprise."

His easy, confident smile filled her with almost overpowering indignation. If she had been a man, feeling herself thus wronged and insulted, she would have taken prompt steps to gain satisfaction.

Fortunately for her, situated as she was, hers was a nature which would not yield to ordinary troubles. Her first impulse was to beat an unceremonious retreat from the rooms, but the smile on Gold Gauntlet's face aroused all her combativeness.

To her it seemed that it was the coward's way to flee, and she felt a strong desire to meet this man with his own weapons and defeat him. How she hated him! His audacity seemed unparalleled.

Desperately she struggled to regain her calmness; there was a choking sensation in her throat, and it was no easy matter to conquer herself, not to mention him.

The first part was done, however; she managed to force a smile, and her voice was steady as she replied:

"Believe me, Mr. Gold Gauntlet, I am not insensitive to your kindness. I know its full value and prize it accordingly."

"Thank you, Miss Lovering."

"I presume you have come to make us a long visit."

"Well," replied the Gladiator, uneasily, for he saw that she was armed against him and, in consequence, something disastrous might occur, "as to that—"

"Joseph can loan you money, if you need it."

Calmly, serenely she spoke, but Gold Gauntlet felt tell-tale color stealing to his face. He had no mean opponent—what would she say next?

"I have money in abundance," he quickly replied.

"Then you have improved your financial standing."

Isabel turned to her brother and added:

"You see, I knew Mr. Gold Gauntlet of old—Nonsense! why call him by such an absurd name? Has he told you his real name? Gold Gauntlet is very romantic, and it seems a pity to divulge the fact that he is, really, plain Jere-

miah Jenkins, but such is the case. Mr. Jenkins won't deny it. Yes, my dear Joseph, I knew him before I came to Utah, and in those old days he was 'dead broke,' if I may use such an unlady-like expression. Do you remember the time, Mr. Jenkins, that you took me out to supper, and then had to borrow money of me to pay for what we ate? Funny, wasn't it?"

Miss Lovering, poised as lightly on her feet as though she were a bird about to fly, rattled off these sentences with the most attractive gayety imaginable.

Her face had flushed a little; her eyes sparkled; her expression was as much one of gay candor as though all that she said had once occurred.

Truly, she was playing her part well; she had accepted the situation, turned the tables on the Gulch Gladiator, and was making the battle very warm for him.

He was dumfounded. He was not named Jenkins, and never had been, and the way she was giving his history, she would soon utterly ruin him. He had come to conquer; he was now on the verge of defeat. Already he saw Joseph looking at him suspiciously; the remarks about his poverty had aroused a suspicion in that gentleman's mind that all was not as it should be.

With a desperate effort Gold Gauntlet forced a laugh.

"I must amend your last three words," he replied. "Make them, 'funny, isn't it?' and I am with you. It was not 'funny' then; I was so confounded poor that only sharp skirmishing kept me in food and clothing. Man is never happy, and now that I am rich I am at a loss to know how to take care of my money."

"If there is enough of it," replied Isabel, lightly, "why not purchase another horse? You could ride both at once, like a circus-rider."

"My own idea is to purchase a wife," he retorted.

"Can't you get one any other way?"

"I know of but one woman who would marry for anything but money—yourself."

"I should suppose any woman would marry you for your pretty clothes and good looks."

Isabel's manner was still vivacious, and her smile was the most sunny imaginable, but even Joseph detected a shade of venom under all.

"Come, come," he interrupted, "this is not the kind of conversation I like; you are going too far, Isabel. I dare say, Mr. Jenkins, you are aware my sister is the most independent woman living. She says what she pleases, and it frequently pleases her to be caustic."

"Miss Lovering and I understand each other."

"So we do, Jerry," the girl pointedly answered.

"Well, let us tone down conversation, anyhow," said Joseph, authoritatively. "Sit down, Isabel; you worry me by standing there. I am considerably surprised, Mr. Jenkins, to learn that you and Isabel are old acquaintances."

There was some suspicion in his voice and manner, and Gold Gauntlet knew that doubts had entered his mind in regard to that fifty thousand dollars which the Gladiator had promised to add to the wealth of Dan City.

"It was a surprise for you," replied the putative Jenkins. "I will explain to you later, when we have our business talk. For the present, will you not favor us with music, Miss Lovering?"

He motioned toward the piano, but Isabel shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Plainly, you don't know Joseph as well as you do me, Jerry," she answered. "Know then, that he is the finest musician in the world—I speak moderately, you see—and that he has such a highly-critical ear that when a novice, like myself, plays, it tears his nerves all to pieces."

"Isabel!" exclaimed her brother.

"I am only stating facts. Joseph, play for us!"

Gold Gauntlet added his request, and Lovering went to the piano. His manner was extremely quiet, but the moment he touched the keys the instrument seemed to become a thing of life, and even Gold Gauntlet, prepared as he was for something remarkable, was surprised. Joseph's touch was perfect; he was, in the full sense of the word, master of the instrument; and the room became filled with melody which would have appealed to the dullest perception and conquered the most obdurate mind.

But what would Joseph have thought had some one told him that the touch of his fingers on the keys was the signal for the beginning of a scheme to ruin him?

Gold Gauntlet, listening to that wonderful melody, remembered his violin.

"What if I should make another flaw in playing?" he thought.

There was a singular connection between the violin and this piano. For two years Gold Gauntlet had practiced almost constantly to become an accomplished player of the violin. Why? Not merely to win Joseph's good will as an able fellow-musician. No; back of that was a subtle point on which depended the Gladiator's future.

He had come to Dan City to play the violin while Joseph played the piano. Then he hoped a certain thing would occur. It might occur within an hour; it might not occur in a year;

but Gold Gauntlet was resolved to continue the crusade until success or utter failure resulted.

A strange drama had begun there in the little town of remote Utah.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE STATE OF AFFAIRS.

GOLD GAUNTLET had for the time utterly forgotten Isabel, but a touch on his arm caused him to look around. The girl stood by his side, looking at him with a defiant expression on her fair face.

"Are you satisfied with the way I received you?" she asked, in anything but a friendly voice.

He glanced quickly at Joseph.

"Have no fear," she added. "While he is playing he is oblivious to all other things. I might shout the words, and he would not hear them; he is mad on the subject of music. He plays grandly, does he not? His is the only piano there is in Dan City, and I believe he would resent the coming of another, for he would surely pronounce whoever played it to be a bungler. But let us speak of ourselves."

"What of ourselves?" Gold Gauntlet asked.

"We are enemies!"

"Pardon me; we are—"

"Enemies," she sternly persisted. "Don't make any mistake, sir; I hate you. When I declared that I would not see you here, I meant it; and I would not have come to this room had I suspected that you were here. Once here, you know how I conducted myself. All that I did was impromptu; it was the act of one at bay, deceived, attacked, persecuted."

"Miss Lovering," the Gladiator exclaimed, "I protest—"

"Be silent!" she said, imperiously. "You shall talk when I am done."

There was nothing hard or unwomanly in her manner, and he had never admired her so much as at that moment. She was justly indignant, and though, to further his scheme against her, he would have tried to pacify her—to blind her—he felt that her cause was just.

"A word now as to the future," she continued. "You insist upon forming my acquaintance. Very well, it shall be so; but there are a few things I must insist upon. We are old acquaintances."

"Agreed."

"Your name is Jeremiah Jenkins."

"Agreed—under protest."

"Outwardly, we are friends."

"Agreed—with thanks."

"Really, we are bitter enemies."

"I can never agree to that—"

"Sir, do you imagine for one moment that it can be otherwise?" she cried. "I tell you that I hate you. So much the better; you have forced your presence upon me, and from this hour we are in battle; it will be wit against wit, and if I do not match you, it will not be because I don't hate you!"

Gold Gauntlet heard and admired. There was still an utter absence of anything harsh or hard in her manner; she was, he silently admitted, a glorious woman justly indignant; a woman wronged, yet all alert to defend herself.

"It is a pity," thought the Gladiator, "that this charming girl must be sacrificed to enable me to crush Joseph Lovering."

Then he answered her last words:

"I will not argue with you on a point where you seem determined, but I must declare that, however much you may hate me, I am not your enemy. I told you in the gulch why I was coming here."

"To annoy me!"

"To marry you!"

With an effort he forced his old, confident air to the surface, as he spoke. Her face flushed.

"I wish you joy!" she retorted. "Usually men are too wise to play with a panther's claws, but it seems that you are resolved to go on to your fate."

"I am."

"Don't blame me if you regret it."

"Despite your warnings, I am sure you will make an affectionate wife," he affirmed, looking full into her eyes.

"Sir," she answered, firmly returning his regard, "I am only a woman, but I believe that if I did not aspire to defeat you at your own reckless, impudent game, I could strike you to my feet this moment!"

"Pardon me, but you would interrupt the music."

"Sneer on. You are a man of courage and self-control, and I recognize in you a strong foe; but, sir, in the end I shall win!"

"Win whom? Why, your humble servant!" and he placed his hand over his heart.

"Heaven forbid! But let us end this vain talk; it is now clearly understood that we are to be bitter enemies, but I will play my part. In public, Mr. Jerry Jenkins, I will be gracious to you."

"And in private, loving."

"Yes; as loving as a tigress."

"Bravo! you are a jewel. I like you more and more, fair Isabel, and I long to see the day

when you will become my wife. Your spirit is admirable; it pleases me to see it."

"You shall see all of it you desire," Isabel retorted. "Be silent, now; Joseph will soon stop playing."

She turned aside and sat down at a distance. Gold Gauntlet watched her curiously, critically. Theirs had been a peculiar conversation, and one possible only with a young lady with peculiarities. Isabel had a good deal of his own firm, combative nature, and in entering upon this armed truce, as it might be called, she did so only because she was confident of his ability to defeat him in the end. She wished to bring him to grief.

His heart smote him not a little. She was too fine a girl to be deliberately sacrificed, but Joseph Lovering was a scoundrel; he must suffer as an atonement for a great wrong he had done, and the surest way to strike him was through Isabel.

The music ceased, and Joseph turned around.

"Mr. Lovering," said the Gladiator, "it would be a waste of breath for me, or any other man whom I know, to praise your playing. One who has a divine gift to such an extent must himself be aware of it fully."

Joseph smiled; the peculiar terms of the compliment pleased him.

"Music is my passion," he answered.

"A worthy one."

"To a great extent, my skill comes from a natural gift; I was considered a prodigy when a mere child. The gift was born with me."

"I could tell that at once. This reminds me, I suppose people think me a crank in regard to music."

Gold Gauntlet shielded his eyes as he spoke: conversation was approaching a crisis, and he felt sure that an eager, anxious look was visible therein.

"I don't understand."

"Haven't they heard my violin?"

"I was not aware that you played."

"I assure you I do, and if you were up in the gulch some evening, you would think the place was haunted by the spirits of the dead. However, don't spread the news, or some one may purloin, or damage my violin, and it cost me a fabulous sum. It is a Cremona, and of wonderful tone."

Joseph had become interested; this was to be seen in his every feature.

"I'd like to see that violin!" he exclaimed.

"You shall."

"It is an instrument which I play, though my preference is for the piano; it is the king of musical instruments. However, if your violin is all that you say of it, I should like to—see it."

He was about to say "hear you play," but so many indifferent players had offended his sensitive ear that he was cautious.

"You shall," Gold Gauntlet answered.

"When?"

"Whenever you say."

"Can you bring it to-morrow evening? I shall be busy until then."

"To-morrow evening suits me well."

"So be it, then."

"I trust that Miss Lovering will honor us with her presence," the Gladiator answered.

"Certainly, Mr. Jenkins; I am curious to see how you and Joseph harmonize in music."

An amused smile swept over her face, and Gold Gauntlet knew how to interpret it. When he came he would be expected to play on the violin. Isabel believed that his execution would tear Joseph's over-sensitive nerves to pieces, and ruin his own cause.

It could not be said that the Gladiator was confident of success. For two years he had been preparing for this ordeal, but though he had left no stone unturned, he still had doubts.

After a little more conversation Joseph politely told Isabel that they would excuse her. Gold Gauntlet suspected why this was done, and when she had gone he proceeded to stop direct questions by observing that he would like Joseph's advice. He then produced a package of papers. These documents seemed to prove that he was actually worth fifty thousand dollars, and over; and the doubts which had arisen in the Mormon's mind were put to rest.

Had he known that these papers were bogus, he would not have part d with his caller in as friendly a way as he did, half an hour later.

Gold Gauntlet rode back to the gulch in a more sober frame of mind than usual.

"The first step is taken, and now I must proceed to crush that villain!" he thought. "Who would imagine that his heart is so black? He looks mild—even weak—but he is a fiend at heart. Few men would have the heartless villainy necessary to do the dark deed that lays at his door. Well, the avenger is on the track, and I pray Heaven that success may crown my efforts. If only I can play the violin to please him, I shall have hope of getting the proof which I desire—ay, that proof shall be secured, even though I sit by his side and play daily until we both grow old and gray. Then, when once the proof is mine—then to strike for vengeance!"

The strange man rode into the gulch with his face set and stern, but, a few minutes after he entered the hut, the sound of a violin was to be

"Commodore, I think I'll go back."

"Back whar? sez he, sharply."

"Ter the States, sez I."

"I think ye won't, sez he. 'We come out hyar ter find the North Pole, an' no man can't back out. You'll keep right on with us, sir,' sez he, savage-like."

"But I ain't wal,' sez I; 'my extremities are cold, an' any doctor will tell you that's a bad sign.'

"Don't expect 'em ter be warm, when the mercury's ninety-two degrees below zeron, do ye? sez he."

"I'm sure I kin hear death's hoofs rattlin' on the ice, an' he's comin' fur me,' sez I."

"He'll back out arter he's see'd ye,' sez he."

"I'd make ye a powerful sight o' work ter dig a grave fur me when the ground is froze thirty-seven feet down,' sez I."

"Don't ye worry about cold weather,' sez he; 'I've spoke for a thaw, an' I'll give you yer share on't right away. I reckon I kin warm ye!'

"With that he took his ramrod an' fell upon me in a very gentleman-like way, an' I'll be shot ef he didn't lick me until the welts stood up all over my pusson like ribs on a skeleton. I had ter submit, 'cause he was my super' or ossifer, an' discipline must be preserved; but when I got him back in the States I paid off the score an' satisfied my conscience."

"You did quite right," Bronx observed. "And now, suppose we take a ramble among the rocks back of us. It is a wild place, and nature seems to have done her best to pile in the rocks to the exclusion of vegetation. It's not a pleasant place, but it may be interesting."

Yank did not object, and they went on with the Modoc following close behind.

The place was all that Bronx had said of it. Barren in the extreme, and a jumble of grim rocks, it presented a marked contrast to the greater part of the vicinity about Dan City. There were no indications that it had been at all frequented by the village people, nor was this strange.

As Yank said, it seemed like a graveyard.

They had gone several yards when their progress was suddenly arrested. Trail-Lifter grasped Yank's arm, and when he had thus gained attention, he held up one of his hands to enjoin silence.

"What is it, Still Tongue?" cautiously asked the veteran.

The mute Modoc's fingers flashed over and across each other, spelling a single word:

"Listen!"

Then he looked keenly about him, and ended by stretching himself at full length upon the ground, his movements being of cat-like quickness.

Bronx looked and listened in vain; he neither saw nor heard anything unusual. His gaze sought Yank's face, and he saw that the latter looked perplexed.

"Voices!" muttered the mountaineer, "but whar do they come from?"

Trail-Lifter made a motion, and Yank lay down beside him. Bronx experienced a feeling of chagrin. These men heard something not audible to his less practiced ears; clearly, he still had much to learn of border craft.

His eyes, however, finally served him better, and he saw near the other two men a cleft which extended diagonally, partly under the massive boulder, and partly into the earth.

Yank motioned to this place, and Bronx lay down, placing one ear near the cleft.

Then he, too, heard something—an irregular click! click! click! like the contact of two hard substances. It continued without intermission for at least a minute, and then abruptly ceased.

"What is it?" Bronx asked.

"Voices o' the 'arth," Nevermiss grimly replied.

"It sounded like the clicking of a pick."

"To be sure."

"Are we over a mine?"

"Did ye ever hear o' a mine nigh Dan City?"

"No. On the contrary, the landlord of the hotel told me there was no precious metal, whatever, about here."

"Hark!"

The warning came from Yank, and Bronx again obeyed. The cleft was no longer noiseless; sounds came to Bronx's ears, but not the same as before. What he heard this time was more important, more convincing; and when, after a few moments, it ceased and the "clicking" sound took its place, the young man turned his gaze upon the mountaineer in perplexity.

"What did ye hear?" Yank asked.

"I could almost swear it was human voices."

"I consait you're right."

Trail-Lifter's nimble fingers flashed a message in his mute language:

"Men down there; they dig. We are over a mine."

"To be sure," said Yank, thoughtfully.

"What does it mean?" inquired Bronx. "If there is really a mine here, the fact has been kept very quiet. It is not strange that the Mo mons should lie to us, for if there is wealth here they are are only wise to keep outsiders

ignorant; but there is not one sign in the village to indicate that mining is going on."

Yank peered into the cleft.

"It's an egregious pity that this hole ain't big enough so we kin crawl in."

"It can't be enlarged; the gigantic boulder, and the ledge below it, positively forbid that."

"Fact, by hurley!"

There was a brief silence, and then Nevermiss added:

"It stands ter reason that this means su'thin'. The bosom o' the 'arth is liable ter be rent with emotion like that o' common man, an' sighs an' groans may come forth; but the wu'ss case o' tribulation an' distress can't make Mother 'Arth talk in human voices—not much, it can't. The idee is strong in my mind that thar is some egregious mystery about all this, an' I'm goin' ter solve it ef sech a thing is ter be did. Come on, boys, an' we'll go on an investigatin' tower!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY OF DAN CITY RESERVATION.

YANK arose abruptly.

"I suppose you intend to look for the entrance to this subterranean place," observed Bronx.

"To be sure."

"I prophesy that we shall not find it."

"I agree."

"Or if we do, that it will be guarded by the Mormons."

"Your i'ees do ye credit. Yas, ef the atrocious insex hev any great secret hyar, you kin rest assured that they hev got the clews hid an' defended. That black an' scowlin' Hurforth looks as though he might be a pirate who sailed the high seas once; very likely he's got a gang o' cut-throats hyar ter guard their secret. Jest keep yer eyes open fur the inemy."

The mountaineer went a few paces, and then suddenly paused.

"It's a melancholy fact that my left foot gives symptoms o' gittin' egregiously scared—it's a weak sister, an' no mistake. I wish, ef ye see any sign o' it runnin' away, you'd fling a rock at it. Between the weak sister an' the newrol'gy, I am awfully beset. You can't imagine what a cross it is ter hev a left foot that is a coward. No other Yellowbird was ever thus 'flicted; they're usually a warrior race. One o' my grandfathers, Joshua Yellowbird, about whom ye may hev heard, was so great a general that he not only licked the inemy like hurley, but when he commanded the sun ter stand still, it obeyed him. I've often told my left foot ter stand still, but it will persist in bein' a weak sister, an' a blot on the Yellowbird pedigree!"

Having thus freed his mind, Nevermiss walked on. His manner was quiet and easy, and his expression placidly satisfied, but his small, gray eyes were ever on the alert. His gaze flitted from point to point, and nothing escaped his notice.

Trail-Lifter was equally alert, but Bronx, well aware that he could not equal these two remarkable men, confined his efforts to looking for possible entrances to the underground place.

Nothing of the kind was found; not even the mark of a spade. If they had been the first of the human race to venture there, it could not have been more deserted, desolate and quiet.

At the end of a hundred yards, however, the mute Modoc suddenly stopped them.

"What now?" Yank asked.

Trail-Lifter pointed ahead.

"Down!" exclaimed the mountaineer, quickly.

The trio sunk to the earth.

"Did ye see?" continued Yank.

"I did," Bronx tersely replied.

"A man, an' a Mormon; leastwise, so it seems. Don't show more nor the top o' yer head."

He reconnoitered carefully.

A few yards away he saw a man walking with a rifle across his shoulder. His course was not direct; at a certain point he turned back, only to go over the ground again. In brief, he was pacing like a soldier on guard.

"I reckon you know what that means," said Nevermiss.

"He is there as a picket."

"Ter protect what?"

"The entrance to the cave—if that is what it is."

"I ain't so sure o' that," Yank answered, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "I begin ter hev another idee, but I may be wrong. You two stay hyer; I'm goin' ter reconnoiter."

Almost before he ceased speaking he was moving away. He went on his hands and knees, and his progress was rapid, silent and skillful—so exceedingly skillful that Bronx was filled with new surprise.

This wanderer of the West was an interesting study to him. During the few weeks he had been in his company he had seen him in all moods, and there had been enough of battle to prove that when the whole West spoke of Yank Yellowbird as a great fighter, nothing was overdrawn. The veteran preferred peace, however, and then his quiet, unassuming, quaint nature came to the surface.

In Bronx's opinion, there was no other man like him.

As the mountaineer disappeared, the younger man looked at Trail-Lifter. The Indian lay like a statue, but his handsome eyes were full of fire. His wild nature would never be tamed.

While they watched the Mormon guard lighted his pipe and lay down on the ground. Evidently he was not required to be very alert.

In due time Yank returned as silently as he had gone. His quiet face told nothing.

"Well?" questioned Bronx.

"Thar ain't no cave-entrance anywhar nigh him."

"Are you sure?"

"I am, that."

"Then why is he there?"

"I hev an idee that we are on forbidden s'ile, an' that we only got inside the fold by climbin' up them rocks as we did—an egregious steep place, whar few would think o' climbin', an' whar no picket seemed necessary."

"Now you speak of it, I heard mention made in the village of Dan City Reservation, whatever that may be; but I don't know where it is."

Yank crooked his long fore finger and shook it at the young man.

"In my opinion, we're on that egregious Reservation this minute!" he declared.

"But why should they 'reserve' this barren place for—Wait! I had forgotten the voices of the earth."

"To be sure."

"What is your theory, Nevermiss?"

"I consait that we hev stumbled onto a mystery, an' the future looms up big, by hurley. What's goin' on under us? Who is thar? How do they git thar? Whar be Lovis an' Inza Dahlgren?"

"In the subterranean abode, perhaps."

The mountaineer smote the breech of his rifle with his hand.

"The long an' short on't is, the town o' Dan has got atrocious insex in it, an' thar is surely work fur us ter do. You two stay hyar once more; I want ter scout."

Bronx was willing to give him this work, and both he and the Modoc remained quiet while Yank glided away with his former caution. This time he was gone longer, and Bronx really began to fear that some mishap had occurred.

He consulted Trail-Lifter, but the latter first made a disdainful gesture, and then began to spell words slowly with his fingers. Bronx could follow him when he did this, though not when those nimble fingers flashed a rapid message to Yank.

"Nevermiss all right; have no fear," spelled the mute.

"But he is gone a long time."

"He no fool."

"I am well aware of that, but the wisest and bravest may meet with a mishap."

"Nevermiss all right."

Trail-Lifter's face bore a dogged expression as he repeated this assertion; he seemed to resent the suggestion that harm might occur to the mountaineer.

Hardly had the last sign been made when the wild, dark eyes of the youth lighted up triumphantly, and he stretched out one hand with the index finger extended.

Yank was returning. He came forward and quickly sat down on a boulder.

"I never see'd anything ter beat this," he observed, "though one o' my ancestors, Martin Luther Yellowbird, did see the Old Nick an' flung an ink-bottle at him, while another o' the family seen snakes in his boots."

"I suppose that you have discovered something unusual," Bronx answered.

"I've satisfied myself that we're in Dan City Reservation, as they call it, but o' all the egregious public parks I ever seen this is the wu'st. Sca'cely a bush, or blade o' grass, in the hull atrocious thing."

"But there is something else, eh?"

"I consait thar is. Tenyrate, hyar is the park, a desolate extent o' some acres; an' erround it is a number o' sign-boards warnin' off trespassers, an' a row o' guards ter enforce that rule. What does it mean?"

"A gold-mine, I should say."

"Possiblly, but not a sign kin I find o' any entrance, or any sign that the ground has be'n worked."

"It is strange."

"Egregious funny, by hurley!"

Yank suddenly arose, and, going to the cleft in the rocks, lay down with his ear as close to it as possible.

"Click! click! click!"

The sound still floated up to him, and when it ceased for a moment, the murmur of voices was to be heard, though not a distinct word.

"Thar is no gettin' erround the fact that somethin' is goin' on underground," he said, partially rising. "Thar is men down thar, an' they're at work. What're they doin'? The nat'r'l inf'rence is, they're minin', yet 'tis said at Dan City that thar ain't no vallerble metal whatever nigh hyar. Thar's an egregious mystery about this, by hurley!"

"If there is an underground place, may not the missing Dahlgren girls be there?" asked Bronx.

"To be sure, they *may*, but be they?"

"I leave it to your say, Nevermiss."

Yank leveled his long forefinger at his friend.

"The atrocious insex who run the town hev got some mean thing ter hide, you may be sure. Why hev they made a 'Reservation' o' barren land—or rocks, ruther—an' sot guards ter protect it? Why do voices come up from the bowels o' 'arth like a voice cryin' in the wilderness?"

"Proceed, Nevermiss."

"That's jest what I intend ter do, but not by empty talk. We kin guess on this matter ontil the crows go ter roost, an' never be no wiser. What's needed is *action*, by hurley!"

"Right, mountaineer, right!"

"We are three men ag'in a town, an' our position is ticklish. Once let that black-browed Hurlforth git the idee that we're dangerous, an' he'll make a bad picnic fur us. The weak sister wobbles at the mere idee. But we'll go on jest the same, an' ef the critters fall onter us, we'll hit back like hurley. I hev an idee that whatever step we take will be right in line o' findin' Lovis an' Inza Dahlgren."

"Your hand, Nevermiss; I am with you!"

They clasped hands, and Bronx, looking into Yank's face, saw that it was full of resolution. The veteran was determined to take up the trail, and though danger might menace them at every step, carry the matter to a crisis.

"The next thing," Yank continued, "is ter beat a retreat. We may not be as lively in gettin' out as when we came in."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN WITH THE FEVER.

THE adventurers moved away, and soon came to the place where they had reached the Reservation by means of such a hard scramble. As before, no guard was in sight, but the descent was by no means as simple a matter as the ascent had been.

Dan City lay below them, with no intervening object until they were nearly at the foot of the rocks, and while going down they would be in a situation similar to that of fruit upon a tree.

If any villager chanced to look up he was more than liable to see them, while if dark-browed Hurlforth discovered them there, secrecy would be at an end; they would be arrayed as interlopers, and the "marshal" would certainly do his best to put them out of the way.

At first there seemed to be no way except to expose themselves thus, but Yank glanced thoughtfully at the setting sun.

"Boys, we now hev a choice o' evils," he announced. "In an hour it will be dark, an' arter that we kin go down 'thout much danger o' bein' seen; but that will be an egregious heap o' danger o' fallin' an' breakin' our necks. Which danger shall we resk?"

Bronx looked uneasily down the steep ledge.

"It will be no easy task," he observed.

"It'll be an atrocious hard 'un, lad."

"But we shall avoid the danger of being detected."

"To be sure."

"Then I say wait, and risk a tumble."

"All right. Lay down behind this boulder an' wait fur the dark; I reckon we kin climb down safe. I've be'n in a heap o' tribulations an' distresses, an' I never got into one yet that I couldn't git out on. 'Member distinctly when I was in Russia, I once went ter ride with the czar in a sled drawn by antelopes, which is the way all Russians trav' in winter. The czar was chatty and sociable, an' we had a right good time at first, but bimeby the wolves got arter us—wolves is thick as fleas in Russia."

"The pack that chased us numbered a trifle less than two million, which was egregious fast runners, an' they pressed us hard. It was an open prairie, an' we raced over seventy mile on the dead jump. Our antelopes run wal, an' I consait we should hev beat 'em, but one o' the runners o' the sled struck a stun' an' throwed us both out. In a minute more the wolves come a-scootin' up, mad fur our blood!"

"I'm a gone goose!" sez the czar, with a screech.

"Not much ye ain't, sez I; 'keep cool an' let yer hair grow, Aleck!'

"Jest then up come the fu'st wolf, an' I grabbed him by the tail an' handed him ter the czar."

"Hang onter him, Aleck," sez I, an' the czar did it like a little man.

"Then I ketched another, an' passed him over."

"Tie their tails tergether, Aleck!" sez I, an' he did it.

"I consait you see my idee. As fast as the atrocious wolves come up I ketched 'em, an' passin' them over ter the czar, he tied 'em tergether by the tails, like firecrackers on the Fourth o' July. We kept it up fur an hour, by which time we had the hull atrocious pack tied up."

"They're harmless now," sez I, "an' we'll leave 'em an' git."

"No," sez the czar, "we'll take 'em with us; thar's a bounty on wolves' heads, an' as I'm

short o' pin-money, we'll take the hull lot ter St. Petersburg."

"An', by hurley, we slung 'em all over our shoulders an' toted 'em in. Aleck was ginerous, an' he divided the bounty-money with me. Thar's nothin' mean erbout him."

"You say," observed Bronx, with a smile, "that there were two millions of the wolves?"

"To be sure."

"It must have been a heavy load."

"Wal, it did make our arms ache, but we never let up. But see hyar; it's half-way between day an' night—s'pose we scramble down the rocks."

The dangerous task was undertaken at once, and for several minutes they swung about on the cliff, going from point to point, and often passing where a misstep would have given them a fatal fall. The base was reached at last, and then they went on to the village.

They sought the hotel at once.

Their first care was to have supper, and then they started up to their room. They had reached the hall of the second floor, which was usually deserted, when a strange man emerged from a door not far away. He was only partially dressed, and Bronx at once noticed that his eyes had an exceedingly wild expression. They had no intention of even speaking to him, but he at once paused before them.

"Don't try to stop me!" he said, in a threatening voice. "I am going out."

"We have no desire to prevent it," Bronx answered.

"I want to find a Gentile," pursued the stranger, with an excited gesture. "You Mormons are all cut-throats!"

"We are not Mormons."

"I believe you are assassins sent to kill me."

"Nonsense! we will not harm you."

The stranger grasped Bronx's arm, and his eyes glittered more than ever.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "I am no common man; I am a person of miraculous powers; I am a magician. If you murder me, my ghost will haunt you forever."

And then he swung his arms more wildly than ever.

"This 'ere," remarked Yank, quietly, "is a poor crazy creetur'. I heerd it said thar was a man hyar sick with fever. This is him. See hyar, mister, you'd better git back ter bed right away, or you'll hev more egregious tribulation than ye hev already."

The stranger did not appear at all convinced, but Yank took him by the arm and, looking into his eyes, talked soothingly. The man grew calmer; he yielded to argument, and allowed himself to be led back to his room and put back to bed. By that time his mood changed completely, and he not only accepted the statement that his present companions were "Gentiles," but, when Bronx sat down beside the bed, clung tightly to his hand. After a consultation Yank and the Modoc went to their room, leaving Bronx with the stranger.

"Don't desert me!" he said, anxiously, as the others went out.

"Have no fear; I'll see to you. I take it you are a stranger in Dan City," answered Bronx.

"I am, and it's a terrible situation. If I was well I would not mind it; I am no coward. Why, I came here all alone, knowing that they would be my enemies, and I came to wage relentless war on them. Yes, it's war to the knife between us, but now that I am ill the odds are all against me. I feel the delirium of fever stealing over me; my mind wanders. A delirious man can't cope with scores of crafty enemies."

The speaker was much calmer than he had been in the hall, and Bronx could not but feel that there was something in his words. He seemed very anxious—even frightened—but his manner was that of a sane person.

His appearance was very much in his favor. He was a handsome young man, with a bold, honest face, and the look and speech of a gentleman.

"No harm shall come to you," replied Bronx, soothingly.

"Ah! you don't know these men of Dan City. I don't believe all Mormons are villains, by any means, but honesty is not represented in this town. Murder is!"

The speaker shivered and looked apprehensively around.

"Have you reason to fear them?"

"I have reason to fear death at their hands!"

"May I ask why?"

"Because my presence here is a menace and a danger to one of the leading men of Dan City. Another came—ah! heaven, what then?"

"I don't understand."

"It was my brother."

"What of him?"

"He was selected to do the work; he came; he disappeared. I feel sure that he was murdered by these infamous men. When I knew that he had failed, I took the task upon myself. I came with a double motive: to do the work he lost his life in trying to do, and to avenge him."

"Are you sure he is dead?"

"I cannot believe otherwise. These men of Dan City are mere assassins, and if he once sus-

pected why my poor brother was here, he would set his Danites upon him."

The speaker shivered again; clearly he was beset with a great fear, real or imaginary. Bronx had gained strong interest in the unfortunate man. He was very ill and feverish, but Bronx believed that he knew what he was saying.

"What is your name?"

"Ralph Severn."

"I take it you are not a Western man."

"I am not; I am from Pennsylvania."

"And you are here to find a lost brother?"

"Yes; that and to bring that villain to justice—to accomplish the work my brother lost his life in trying to do. Now I have fallen ill, and am losing my mind, among men who will kill me at once if they suspect who I am and what—"

The speaker broke off suddenly, and a startled look appeared in his eyes. He trembled like a child, and gasped:

"Somebody is listening at the door!"

Bronx had heard nothing, and he was inclined to think that Severn had imagined everything.

"Quick!" the sick man added; "look into the hall!"

The order was obeyed as promptly as possible, but the hall was silent and deserted.

"I think you were mistaken; I heard nothing," said Bronx.

"Some one was surely in the hall, and I think he was listening at this door. My hearing is very acute now. Oh! heavens, what pains shoot through my head!"

Bronx clasped both hands upon his forehead.

"Have you had a doctor?" Bronx asked.

"No."

"You must do so at once."

"I dare not; I should be liable to lose my wits and babble at any moment, and the doctor would betray me."

"But you may die without medical attendance."

"What in heaven's name am I to do?" Severn asked, despairingly.

"Summon a doctor, and trust to me to protect your secret. I'll do my best to keep you from talking to your peril."

"You don't know what danger you are dargin. Once let Joseph Lovering even suspect my real name and I am a doomed man. My brother came here first; he disappeared; he was surely murdered. Of course Lovering learned the truth and set his Danites upon him. Well, the mere mention of my real name—I am known here by an assumed one; I have forgotten what—and Lovering will know that I am here to do the work my brother died in trying to do. That wold mean death to me!"

The unfortunate man moaned and tossed upon the bed. His nature was naturally bold, but illness had sapped his strength and his courage, alike.

"All this may be true, but it is madness to let you go without medical attendance," replied Bronx, firmly. "Stay! I have another idea. My companion whom you just saw is well informed in regard to the medical properties of roots and herbs, and the young Indian may have similar knowledge. I will consult them, and then see you again."

He arose as he spoke.

"Don't be gone long," said Severn, nervously. "I am in constant dread of the Danites. I am no coward, believe me, but I am in deadly peril, and not able to defend myself."

"I won't be gone five minutes. Wait patiently!"

Bronx hastened to his own room, which was several doors away, and found Yank and Trail-Lifter there.

"Hello!" said the mountaineer, "how's yer patient? I'm through hyar an' was jest comin' in ter see him ag'in."

Hendershot hastily explained the situation, but Yank shook his head.

"He must hev a real doctor. Ef thar was no other way I'd do my best, but a doctor may break up the fever, ef he sets about it. I'll see the man, though, an' then we'll talk it over. Come on!"

They passed through the hall, and Bronx opened the door of Severn's room. As he did so he stopped in surprise. The bed was vacant, and Severn was not in the room. Bronx unclosed his lips to comment upon this fact, but the words were not spoken. Instead, he suddenly recoiled in dismay. Upon the white sheet of the bed was a wide trail of fresh blood!

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLD GAUNTLET PLAYS THE VIOLIN.

THE following day Isabel Lovering was seated alone in the parlor of her home when the door-bell rung. She heard it answered by a servant, but took no particular interest in the matter until it became evident that an altercation was progressing between the servant and some one else.

She opened the parlor door and saw a man who was a stranger to her. He was evidently trying to pass the servant, who was as plainly trying to help him out, but as her attention was diverted by Isabel's movements, he succeeded in his object.

Isabel believed the man to be intoxicated, and

she retreated to the parlor, but before she could close the door, he had followed her.

"My dear young lady," he said, smiling so broadly that his mouth seemed in danger of running entirely around his head, "I beg that yew will not be alarmed. If there is a owt-an'-owt gentleman in Utah, I am the man, by gosh! I come from the most religious hamlet in the U. S.—which same is Pine-Apple, State o' Massachusetts. We're so good there that we never sneeze on Sunday 'thout we go down-suller tew dew it—fack, I snum!"

All this had been said at race-horse speed, but if the man had an over-nimble tongue, he was certainly mild enough of appearance.

Isabel had regained her composure.

"What is all this to me?" she asked.

"It's a matter o' vital importance, fur I want yewr good will. Yew hev mine a'ready, an' I tell yew Phineas French ain't a man tew be sneezed at, ef he is freckled."

"Still, I am in the dark, sir."

"I will explain; thank yew fur the permission. I take it yew are the elder's newest bride."

"I, sir?" cried Isabel, indignantly. "No, sir; I am the bride of nobody. What in the world are you trying to say, sir, anyhow?"

"Miss, miss, hold on!" implored Phineas. "I feel as cheap as a yarler dog, an' I apologize. Any one could see by yewr looks that yew ain't old enough tew be a wife; the rosy hue o' youthfull beauty is still hoverin' over yewr cheeks like an April mornin'—or words to that efeek."

"Mr. French, if that is your name, the servant is anxious to show you the door, and her judgment is excellent. You will please—"

"Hold on, hold on! Give me one minute, please! Yew don't know what depends on't, by gosh! I see now that yew must be Elder Lovering's sister, not one o' his wives. It is with them I hev business. I, Miss Lovering, am in the far West as a benefactor o' the human race; I am travelin' agent fur a Bawston house which makes them onrivalled articles o' the toilet—the Circassio-Orient Hair Tonic, the Pearl o' Great Price Tooth Powder, the Elysian Eyebright Optic-Bath, an' the Balm o' Beauty; the last o' which will make the face o' the homeliest woman as pootty as that o' a ten-year-old girl!"

"But, sir—"

"Of course," rattled on Phineas, as though his life was at stake, "yew don't need 'em; fur if there ever was a rose as sweet an' pootty as you, I never seen it, I swan! But in yewr brother's harem there must be some wives who are gittin' intew the sere an' yellor leaf, or, as they would say in French, are passe. Now, my *magnum bonum, ne plus ultra*, sure-ter-git-thar toilet articles will certainly restore all their olden beauty—"

"But they are not—"

"Oh, some of 'em must be passe!" persisted French.

An angry sparkle in Isabel's eyes warned the glib-tongued traveling-agent that he must let her speak, and as he had duly extolled his wares he did not again interrupt her.

"Sir," she said, contemptuously, "I am not disposed to help you sell articles which, I dare say, are utter humbugs, but in order to get rid of you I will say that my brother's wives are not here."

"Not here?"

"No."

"Then where be they?"

"At his other residence."

"Then he has tew?"

"Certainly, he has two. Do you suppose—"

Isabel did not finish the sentence. It remained a fact, however, that she had utterly refused to join Joseph in Dan City until he had provided a separate house for her; she had declined to live under the same roof with a multiplicity of wives.

All that she had said was a revelation to Phineas, however. That honest person had entered heartily into the scheme to help get a trace of Lovis and Inza, and he had a double object in his present movements.

He now did some quick thinking, and, with a politeness peculiarly his own, replied:

"Gosh all hemlocks! miss, I'm awful sorry I put my foot in it so. Hope you'll overlook it."

"Believing that you meant no harm, I will."

"But ain't there nobody I can sell my *ne plus ultra* toilet article tew, in this house?"

"I think not."

Phineas glanced at the servant-girl.

"I don't want none o' yer quack lotions an' intments!" she contemptuously declared.

Phineas raised both hands in horror.

"There is no other woman in the house, so you see that you may as well go," added Isabel, somewhat impatiently.

"I will, right away. Thank yew fur yewr kindness, an' yewr favorable mention o' my *ne plus ultra* articles. I'll call ag'in, thank yew. Splendid day, miss, but nothin' like what yew might see in Pine-Apple ef—"

The voluble Yankee stopped short. He had reached the doorstep, and at that point the servant slammed the door in his face. His expression remained as serene as ever.

"Guess the wind blew it tew," he observed. "I was jest goin' tew ask fur a recommendation o' my Elysian Eyebright Optic Bath, but I kin call ag'in. Now fur Lovering's other house. Ef they receive me in as friendly way as they did here, I'm in hopes I'll git some trace o' the Dahlgren gals. Gosh all hemlocks! ef I kin eucher 'em owt o' the gals, an' then sell a few barrels o' my toilet articles, I guess the pesky Mormons won't soon forgit Phineas French!"

That evening Gold Gauntlet rode out of the gulch, down through the village, and to the first of Joseph Lovering's houses. He did not ride in his usual reckless fashion; across his saddle he bore a box of oblong shape.

In this was his beloved violin, and he was careful not to injure it.

Joseph met him at the door. Usually the hypercritical musician had no confidence in any other person until he, or she, had shown rare ability in actual practice; but the Gulch Gladiator had unconsciously obtained a hold upon him.

Joseph hoped much from the Gladiator and his violin.

Somewhat to his surprise Gold Gauntlet found Isabel in the parlor, and his face lighted at the sight.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said to her, in a low voice.

"Why so?"

"I hardly expected to see you here, I confess."

"Do you know why I am here?"

"N-no," was the hesitating reply.

Isabel's eyes flashed.

"It is to see you humiliated!" he declared.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You have about one chance in two hundred of pleasing my fastidious brother. He will bear you; your execution will tear his nerves to pieces; he will hold his hands over his ears and order you to stop. From that time the sight of you will be obnoxious to him. Jerry Jenkins, I am here to see you fail ignominiously!"

Brighter than ever flushed her eyes; her voice rung out mockingly. Poised in the peculiar, airy way characteristic of her, like a bird ready to fly, and with her face flushed, she was as beautiful and charming as woman could be.

Gold Gauntlet's face flushed; his armor of confidence and assurance was not proof against this plainly-expressed hope of his downfall.

One moment he was speechless; then the old, cool smile appeared on his face.

"My dear Isabel," he replied, "I thank you a million times. Did you ever read in an old romance how bravely a steel-clad knight would battle if he but wore a favor of his lady-love upon his crest or arm? I go to battle similarly equipped."

"Your armor is of brass!" retorted the girl.

"True; and it is so well tempered that even the shaft of woman's sarcasm cannot pierce it."

"You will fall through your own weakness."

"And leave you to break your heart for me? Never!"

The Gladiator glanced quickly at Joseph, who was busy with sheet-music at the piano. Lowering his voice still more, Gold Gauntlet exclaimed:

"Fair Isabel, I shall win!"

The girl tossed her head.

"We shall see!" she retorted.

He bent his kingly head until his rippling hair almost touched her forehead.

"Charming Isabel," he said, in a voice which was like a caress, "this is a matter worthy of a wager. I will stake my heart against yours that I please Joseph!"

"I do not give such odds!" she quickly replied, with fine sarcasm.

"Then I'll make another proposal, and I dare you to accept. If I fail to please him, I will go away and never see you again; if I win, you are to be my wife!"

His powerful eyes were like a magnet; she felt attracted to him, and hated herself for it. Her face flushed even more deeply.

"I decline!"

"What!" he retorted, mockingly, "are you such a timid gamester? You have avowed that I have but one chance in two hundred. Do you fear to bet with the odds one hundred and ninety-nine to one in your favor?"

"Be silent!" she returned, in a husky voice, and he could see that she was almost panting for breath. "You talk folly; I will make no wager."

"As you will, Isabel, but remember this: You and I were created for each other, and however I handle the bow, you will be mine in the end. Mrs. Jerry Jenkins! Not a bad-sounding name, my own love!"

Isabel moved away from him with an angry sweep. How she hated this man! This was the thought that was in her mind, but she knew there was something more. If he repelled, he also attracted her. She wavered between two extremes. He had a power she could not resist, try as she would.

His gaze followed her, and his eyes gleamed with admiration. Here was a woman of a thousand! He had decided that he must sacri-

fice her—break her heart. Verily, it was a conquest worth making. She was unlike other women. Skilled in sharp retorts, she was never hard, unwomanly, or aught but charming.

"Mr. Jenkins, are you ready?"

Joseph's voice broke the spell.

"All ready," Gold Gauntlet replied.

He proceeded to remove his violin from the box. He had never been calmer than then. For two years he had been preparing for this hour as though his life depended upon it; he had satisfaction for a great wrong to win, or all to lose, on his playing that evening.

From the first had felt grave doubts and fears. These had never left him until he entered the parlor; they would not have vanished even then only for what Isabel had said.

That conversation had turned his nerves to steel.

He had double victory to seek.
He drew the bow across the strings.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOSEPH'S VERDICT.

GOLD GAUNTLET proceeded to bring the violin to a point of scientific accuracy. While he was thus occupied Isabel's eyes and mind were busy. She was painfully anxious to see him fail, and it was against her that Joseph was in an unusually complacent mood.

Suddenly her eyes flashed.

She had a scheme for ruffling Joseph's composure. She was a pianist of no mean merit, but she fell so far below Joseph's ideal that she always upset his over-sensitive nerves when she played.

With a quick movement she went to the piano and swept her hands over the keys. She had never tried less to play well, and her brother's voice at once arose.

"Isabel!"

She gave no heed. She had begun a quick, loud piece of music, and the noise filled the room. Joseph's brows were contracted in a frown, which seemed to be more of actual pain than anger. He arose, strode forward and grasped one of her wrists.

"For heaven's sake stop that hideous racket!" he exclaimed, like one suffering intensely.

"What! am I to have no part?" Isabel asked, and her manner appeared to be as frank as it was bright.

"You know I—"

"If there is to be a musical entertainment, I ought, at least, to be allowed to play the overture."

"Pray allow her to proceed, Mr. Lovering," requested Gold Gauntlet, in a pleasant voice. *I understand her motive!* She seeks to put me at ease. Believe me, Miss Isabel, I am deeply grateful; I shall not forget your kindness!"

Isabel flashed a glance at the speaker.

She met the strong gaze of his dark eyes, and knew as well as though the words had been spoken that he fully understood why she had played.

"I object, decidedly!" curtly answered Lovering. "Isabel, you will please resume your seat yonder."

"What an old growler you are, Joseph!" retorted the girl, gayly, as she promptly obeyed his direction.

Her mind was filled with exultation; she had accomplished her object. Joseph was scowling; he was angry, nervous and ill at ease. If Gold Gauntlet played to suit him now, the Gladiator's execution would, indeed, be marvelous.

She glanced at the visitor. A calm, confident smile was on his face.

"There is no danger," she thought. "He is too ignorant to appreciate the possibility of failure."

Gold Gauntlet was ready. Once more he drew the bow across the strings. Another moment and he began his work in earnest. His selection was a waltz, and before the first bar had been played, Isabel's face clouded. She might not be an expert in music, but she knew that she had misjudged the player a moment before.

He was not a bungler; he was an expert.

Isabel's first emotion was one of disagreeable surprise, but it slowly faded away. She forgot what was at stake, and remembered only to listen. Never before had she heard a violin played as Gold Gauntlet played it. Joseph was remarkably skillful, but, as he had said, his preference was for the piano. He seldom played the violin.

Gold Gauntlet little knew the unspoken compliment his execution was receiving. Isabel had forgotten how much she wished him to fail; she knew only that he was playing, and that the violin was rendering melody for which she had never before given it credit.

After awhile memory returned to her. She turned her gaze upon Joseph; he sat like a statue, his lips parted, his gaze fixed intently upon the player.

A feeling of resentment and anger swept over Isabel; she knew that if the Gladiator could continue as he had begun, victory would surely be his.

The waltz finished, he glided into a second tune without waiting for comments. It was quite different from the first, but it only served

to emphasize the fact that he was a wonderful player. Isabel had never before understood the possibilities of a violin, but in Gold Gauntlet's hands it proved itself an instrument of melody, indeed.

Unknown to any of the trio, there was a fourth listener, a fourth observer. One of the window-curtains had not been wholly lowered, and an avenue of observation was left for any one who might be outside. No one in the house had thought that it would be, or was being, used.

Yet, such was the fact. Several times since Gold Gauntlet's arrival, a head had been cautiously raised above the sill of the window; a face had been pressed close to the glass; a pair of glittering eyes had surveyed the room and its inmates; and in every case a muttered curse had fallen from the spy's lips as he lowered his head.

He was anxious to avoid discovery.

This spy was the Hurlforth, the so-called Marshal of Dan City. He had not been invited to the musical entertainment, yet he was at hand. If he was not enough of a friend to be invited, he was enough of an enemy to come without invitation.

Never pleasant or inviting, the marshal's face on this occasion was darker and more sinister than usual. His heart—his real nature—was pictured on his face, and its expression was murderous.

Once he half-drew a revolver from his pocket, but thrust it back with a grim smile.

"I can afford to wait!" he muttered.

Unconscious of this ominous observer, the trio in the room kept their places. Gold Gauntlet played on, and in every sweep of the bow showed that he was an expert. The teaching of those skillful men of the East had not been thrown away; he awoke melody which few players had been able to extract from a violin, and the room seemed a gathering-place for entrancing sounds.

As he played, he watched his hearers keenly, yet with a degree of secrecy.

From the first Joseph was very favorably impressed, and as the playing went on, the impression deepened. Gold Gauntlet knew from the Mormon's expression that he was conquered. Hyper-critical he might be, but victory was with the Gladiator.

Once the player smiled slightly as he noticed Isabel's expression. She, too, recognized his power, but she was not pleased. Dismay, disappointment and anger were plainly her ruling emotions.

Gold Gauntlet's victory was her defeat.

The Gladiator ceased playing and lowered the violin.

Joseph started like one suddenly aroused from slumber, and then strode forward and gave his hand to Gold Gauntlet.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, "you are an unrivaled player, Jenkins!"

"Do you really like my playing?"

"Like it! It is grand!"

"I'm glad you find something in it."

"I have heard fine violinists in my day, but never one who could equal you."

"You flatter me, now."

"No, indeed!" declared Joseph, enthusiastically. "I only give you your due. If you knew how sensitive I am in regard to music, you would not question my sincerity."

If he knew! No one knew better than Gold Gauntlet, and this knowledge had caused him to devote years to learning to play the violin. He had worked with two objects. The first seemed accomplished, for he had won Joseph's warm praise. But what of the second? When would that be accomplished? Perhaps within the hour. Or perhaps he might keep Joseph's company for years, playing his violin daily, before it would come to pass. Or the grave might close over them both, leaving the end unattained.

Mystery hovered deeply over the Gulch Gladiator, and it seemed odd that such a trivial thing as violin-playing was associated with such a cool, clear-headed, strong-minded man—with such an intense, important, heart-felt, determined purpose.

"Anyhow, I am glad that you like my efforts," he replied.

"I do, and unless you are a hard-hearted man I have not heard the last of them. We met in a rather strange way, but such experiences are common in the West; all things happen here. Who knows what will come next?"

Gold Gauntlet could hardly avoid a start.

"Who, indeed?" he muttered.

"One thing I must say right here."

"And that?"

"It has become a matter of vital importance that you remain at Dan City permanently."

"Why so?"

"I should be inconsolable to part from such a musician as you. I don't know another person in Utah who can play except like a blacksmith. If you remain, there will be one congenial spirit for us to associate with. You and I, the violin and the piano, will make a wonderful quartette. What do you say—will you stay?"

Joseph spoke with unusual eagerness. A look of satisfaction was barely visible in the Gladiator's face. He glanced at Miss Lovering.

"Isabel," said her brother, "ask him to remain."

The girl's face flushed slightly; she made a gesture of disdain.

"He is your guest," she answered.

"Can't you extend a common civility?" he asked, in an irritable voice.

"You will remember," she deliberately replied, "that you and I have agreed to let each manage his, or her, own affairs. This gentleman is your friend, not mine."

"Isabel?"

It was more of a question than an exclamation, yet there was a good deal of emphatic surprise in it."

"Well?"

"Have you spoken falsely to me?"

"In what way?"

"You told me that Mr. Jenkins was an old friend; you even addressed him familiarly as 'Jerry'?"

Isabel's face flushed; her reckless bravado was coming home to her in a way not pleasant.

There was a momentary silence, while the spy at the window stared through the glass and wondered what was occurring. Everything they did served to make Hurlforth look more angry.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARSHAL'S INNING.

HURLFORTH had great curiosity to know what was being said inside, but he might just as well have wished for an impossibility. He could not hear a word. Twice he had tried the window, but it was fastened, and while it was down he could not overhear anything. He could only watch, but this made him more angry, and he muttered fresh curses.

"One thing," he added, "my turn will come, and then I will have revenge!"

Gold Gauntlet enjoyed Isabel's confusion for a moment, but he was as anxious to prevent any exposure as she could be—it might interfere with his plot—and he came to her rescue.

"Justice to Miss Lovering requires an explanation," he observed, quietly. "We are well acquainted, but we parted in a way not exactly friendly. Frankly, it was all my own fault, but I was more hot-headed then than now. You see, Joseph, I was no stoic, and when I met Miss Lovering I became very much interested. I paid her attention, but she did not consider it worth receiving. It was her woman's privilege to rebuff me, but I did not take it kindly. In brief, when she refused to accept me as an escort I lost my temper and acted like an idiot. No wonder she don't care to call me friend, but I am free to confess that I was all wrong, and hope she will forgive me."

Isabel listened to this fiction with mixed emotions. Into what a labyrinth the first deception was leading her! Gold Gauntlet had made an explanation so plausible that it was likely to prove satisfactory unless Joseph was more inquisitive than usual, but every turn was making her more and more the ally of this strange man whom she hated.

Should she boldly free herself from the web, and confess all, or let it go as he had said?

"What! confess and disgrace myself?" she thought, quickly. "No; I will let it pass; 'tis but a small affair; and in the near future I will teach this audacious fellow a lesson. If my woman's wit is not enough to cope successfully with any man, then I ought to lose!"

"Am I not right, Miss Lovering?" the Gladiator asked, in a low voice.

"Certainly."

"Also, I trust that you will overlook my past follies."

"I will; I do."

"I would be glad to be reinstated in your favor."

"If such a thing will please you, be happy."

"Thank you."

"Having settled this," interpolated Joseph, who suspected nothing, "I beg that you will favor us with more playing. It's a rare treat, I assure you."

Gold Gauntlet played again, while Hurlforth scowled at them through the window.

"What in perdition have they been saying, I wonder," he muttered. "There is more going on there, than I can understand; the face of the divine Isabel is a panorama. Joe Lovering is as stupid as ever, which is saying a good deal, but I believe there is a secret between that cussed stranger and Isabel. Well, what of it? To-night sees the end of it all. He has Joe under his thumb, and this is a case where the Marshal of Dan City should act on his own judgment. I will act!"

He glided away, and at the distance of ten rods came upon three men who were seated in a retired place, smoking and talking.

They were named respectively Steve Higgins, Len Soper, and Pete Dooms, and were Hurlforth's most trusted instruments in carrying out the will of the rulers of Dan City.

"So you're here," said the marshal.

"You see us, don't yer?" surlily asked Higgins.

"Yes."

"We're havin' a pile o' fun, waitin'."

"What of it? Your temper is upset, as usual,

Steve. Never mind; there is active work again, as I thought there would be. You know that reckless dare-devil who lives in the gulch up north?"

"Yas."

"He will return home sometime inside of two hours. I want you three men to go to the gulch and ambush yourselves by his cabin. When he comes, drop on him. He is a muscular fellow, and if he's given a chance will be likely to make it warm for you. Don't give him the chance. Contrive to knock him senseless before he suspects any danger."

"Correct," Higgins replied.

"Can you manage him?"

"Can we? That's an insult onto your honor."

"Don't think he is a child, and thereby get left. I can see with half an eye that he is a bold, desperate fellow; he will make it warm for you if you give him a show."

"Why not shoot him down off-hand?"

"I have other uses for him."

"Wal, you're boss."

"Once you have him netted," continued Hurlforth, "bring him to the small cave."

The men agreed—it was their duty to obey whatever nefarious work Hurlforth planned—and after some additional directions, the marshal hastened back to his point of observation at Lovering's.

Gold Gauntlet was just putting his violin in the box.

His additional playing had made complete conquest of Joseph.

"Hereafter," said the latter, "I hope to see you here often."

"Thank you; I shall be pleased to come."

"Whenever you can, bring your violin."

"I will."

"Words fail to adequately express how your playing pleases me," Joseph earnestly added.

"Thank you, again. After this, however, you must do your share of the playing. I want to hear you play the piano, and, since you confess that you are a violinist, I must insist upon your doing your share with that also."

"I am a bungler with the violin compared to you, but I will not refuse. We want to see you often; you will always be welcome."

Gold Gauntlet turned his gaze upon Isabel, and she believed that she saw not only a request but a menace there.

"He dares threaten me!" she thought. "This man is almost unbearable with his impudence, but, once more, I will yield to him. My turn will come next, and then I will outwit, humiliate and overthrow him."

Aloud she said:

"I echo my brother's words, Mr. Jenkins."

"Then I shall certainly come."

Five minutes later he left the house. Re-mounting his horse, he rode homeward. He took good care of his violin, but it was chiefly instinctive; his mind was wholly wrapped up in thought of other things.

"One step is taken," he was thinking; "I have played before Joseph and pleased him. My long, careful study has not been thrown away. One step is taken, and now to go on to the end. Will that for which I am working ever occur? Heaven alone knows! I may keep Joseph's company for months, and never advance another step. If ever he passes the line, however, let him beware; I will crush him. How I hate that oily-tongued wretch!"

He clinched his gauntleted hand and smote himself on the thigh.

"Vengeance shall be mine! I believe that I am almost a monomaniac on this subject, but my cause is just. I will revenge that foul wrong—if I do not, I doubt if I can keep myself within bounds; my blood runs in my veins like molten lava. Patience! patience! I feel that I shall win in the end. What a blessing it is that Joseph has a sister; it leaves a weak point open for my attack. Isabel is a fine girl, but she must be sacrificed to break his heart!"

Unknown to Gold Gauntlet, his departure from Lovering's had been observed by one pair of unfriendly eyes.

Hurlforth watched him go, and the marshal shook his clinched hand dramatically after him.

"It will be my inning next!" muttered the man, and then he beat a rapid retreat.

Leaving the village, he moved quickly along over the rough ground which marked the beginning of the hills. In this way he soon reached a gulch about one-fourth of a mile from Gold Gauntlet's hut. At one side of this was a small cave; he entered this.

His first care was to light a lamp which stood at one side. The place had been occupied before, for boards and short lengths of logs served to make a rude table, and equally rude benches, while a few blankets were scattered about.

There was only one other thing of importance. Hurlforth hastened to a barrel which stood in a remote corner, and from this he took two articles. One was a cloak, which he threw over his shoulders; the other was a mask, or, more properly, a complete armor for the head, with openings for the eyes.

When he had donned this his disguise was perfect.

This was what he desired. He had work in hand of a nature which made him anxious to conceal his identity. He sat down and waited.

His patience was not severely tried. Voices soon sounded outside, and when he went to the entrance he saw several men and a horse. The men were lifting something from the animal's back, and as he retreated they bore their burden into the cave. It was a man; more than that, it was Gold Gauntlet.

"You haven't killed him?" exclaimed Hurlforth, noticing that the Gladiator's face was very pale.

"No; he's only stunned. I gave him a hard rap, an' he is still unconscious. I bound him, ye see, but only for caution. He's as good as dead, jest now."

"Better, by far?"

The words suddenly fell from Gold Gauntlet's lips, and he opened his eyes and sat erect on the bench where he had been placed. Struck down at his hut according to the plan formed by Hurlforth, he had recovered consciousness during the subsequent journey, but had found his bonds too strong to be broken.

"Good?" commented Hurlforth.

The Gladiator looked at him sharply.

"Are you leader here?"

"Yes."

"I'll thank you to release me," returned Gold Gauntlet, as coolly as though it was an everyday affair.

"You were not brought here for that purpose."

"What then?"

"Because," replied Hurlforth, in a hard voice, "you have made yourself offensive at Dan City. You were brought here to die!"

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUL PLAY.

It was twenty-four hours previous to the scenes last described that Bronx Hendershot made the acquaintance of the strange young man at the hotel, only to find him missing shortly after under such startling circumstances.

Severn's disappearance might have been simply explained, since he had already once wandered into the hall in his partial delirium, but the blood upon the bed-clothing was a very different matter.

Hendershot could only point to it silently, but Yank Yellowbird stepped forward quickly, bent down and examined the red stain more carefully.

"By hurley!" he then exclaimed, "this looks bad!"

"Yank, murder has been done!"

"I hope not, lad."

"Then how do you account for the blood?"

"The poor critter may hav' wounded hisself."

"No, no; he was very anxious to live; he would not attempt suicide."

"Ef anybody's done harm to a man sick as him, 'twas an atrocious mean trick, by hurley!"

"He feared it; he suspected that it would be so. He said that he had the utmost reason to fear the men of Dan City if his history—his motive in coming here—was known. Yank, the worst has come to pass; he has been murdered by those scoundrels."

"Softly, softly," replied the mountaineer, for the younger man's voice had rung out louder than was safe. "Keep cool until I look inter this a bit. The young feller has met with some tribulation, I consait, but it don't foller that he's killed. Let me look!"

Yank took the light and made a careful survey of the room, and that part of the hall near the door.

Bronx waited impatiently for his report.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, anon.

Yank raised his hand and, as he answered, waved his long fore-finger at his companion.

"The long an' short on't is, you're right. The sick man has come ter grief most egregiously, an' thar ain't no doubt but the atrocious insex has murdered him."

"But where is the body?"

"I consait that it has been took away in a blanket, or some sech contrivance. Thar ain't no blood in the hall, nor in this room, an' it natrally follers that they used means ter prevent it."

"And the murderers—who are they?"

Nevermiss looked cautiously about.

"You've heerd o' Danites, ain't ye?"

"Yes, but I was under the impression that they were creatures of the past."

"Not in Dan City. This hyar egregious town is wu's than Paris was when Herod inaugerated the Storm o' Terror, or whatever they called it."

"I believe in your theory, for Severn mentioned that he had great reason to fear the rulers of Dan City. He mentioned Lovering in particular. He came here under some assumed name, but Lovering probably found him out—as Severn feared he would—and set Hurlforth and his creatures upon him."

"That Hurlforth will git his neck wrung ef he ain't careful. I'm painfully 'flicted with newrolgy, but it kindly lets up when I git inter a skirmish."

"What are we to do about this matter?"

"Jest what I was tryin' ter decide," Yank replied, gravely. "How shall we proceed? We can't act as in an ord'rary case, fur it ain't that kind o' a case, at all. S'pose we go to the landlord. He'll scowl on us an' say nothin'. S'pose we go ter the plice. Hurlforth represents the plice, sech as 'tis, an' the atrocious insex will tell us ter mind our own business."

"Or, learning that we know so much, try to murder us, also," Hendershot added.

"I'd like ter see him try it, by hurley!" declared Yank, a transient fire in his gray eyes. "He'd come ter grief, I kin assure you! No Yellowbird would consent ter be wu'sted by him—why, in sech a case, even the weak sister would rise up in arms ter defend the honor o' the fam'ly pedigree."

The mountaineer suddenly turned away.

"Come, lad," he added, "we'll go down an' see the landlord. I consait that we'll only git ourselves inter a heap o' tribulation an' distress, but we can't let this unfortinit young man go unavenged. Not much, we can't!"

Nevermiss spoke emphatically, and after one more glance at the gory stain on the sheet, Bronx followed him from the room.

A few words of explanation were given to Trail-Lifter—an explanation which made the Modoc's dark eyes flash wildly—and then the two men descended to the lower floor. They chanced to meet the landlord, who was a sleek, oily old Mormon, in a retired place.

"Mister," said Yank, abruptly, "you've got a lodger who's down with fever, ain't ye?"

The landlord looked at him with dull eyes, his fat face telling no tales.

"Yes," he briefly replied.

"By the name o'—what is it?"

"Alfred Taber."

"To be sure. Wal, whar is he now?"

"In his room."

"Not much, he ain't."

"No? Can it be he has wandered away in his state of mental aberration?"

"Such a thing is possible, an' other things is possible, too. In fact, I hav' made a diskivery which agitates me like hurley. Ye see, I went ter my room, but the egregious newrolgy was snappin' my j'nts so oncommon bad that I thought I'd git suthin' for it. I sat out. My way was past Mr. Taber's door, an' the door was open. Naturally I sorter glanced in. What d'y'e s'pose I seen?"

"I don't know. What?"

The landlord's face remained impassive, but Bronx believed that he could see a glitter in the man's eyes which meant no good.

"The room was empty, an' on the sheet o' the bed was a big streak o' fresh blood."

Yank made the statement very quietly, but his gaze was upon the landlord's face. The latter received the news phlegmatically.

"I'll send a servant up to see about it," he replied. "You need not trouble yourself any more about it; we will properly attend to the case."

It was quietly said, but neither Yank nor Bronx failed to discover an undercurrent. Under the thin mask of courtesy was a suggestion to them to interfere no more in the case of the so-called Alfred Taber.

"We'll set down hyar an' hear the report," returned the mountaineer, coolly.

"Very well."

The landlord answered like a machine, and at once started an investigation, such as it was. The servants soon reported to him that Taber was not to be found in the house.

"He has probably left to swindle me out of what he owes me," said the landlord. "Well, let him go."

"Consid'r'in' he was out o' his head, you give him credit fur a good 'eal o' sharpness," Yank dryly observed.

"How do you know he was out of his head?" the landlord sharply asked.

"Didn't you say so a few minutes ago?"

"Did I?"

"To be sure."

"Well, let him go, anyhow."

"What erbout the smooch o' blood on the bed-clothes?"

"Well, what about it?" was the sharp retort.

"He left an egregious pile o' his blood fur a man who jumped his board-bill."

"What do you infer from that?"

"Wal, I asked fur information, ye see."

"You can have it. The information is that you will accommodate me by going back to your room and minding your own business; I want no more of your interference. More than that, I won't have it. Is that plain?"

"Wal, tolerably so," the mountaineer replied, with undisturbed serenity. "It was always a peculiarity o' the Yellowbirds that they could take a hint when it was offered. I haven't a doubt but you'll attend ter the matter in a prompt an' thorough way. We'll bid ye good-night now."

The two men ascended to their room once more.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Bronx inquired.

"Your fu'st idea was right."

"There has been foul play."

"Thar ain't a shadder o' doubt on't."

"Nevermiss, this is a terrible state of affairs."

"To be sure."

"Little as I saw of Severn, alias Taber, I was favorably impressed by him; he seemed to be a fine young man. He came to Dan City to avenge some wrong done him, or some one else, by one of these Mormons—Lovering I believe. Before that, his brother had come. The brother disappeared, and Severn believes that he was murdered by the Danites. Now this man has disappeared under circumstances which leave no doubt of foul play."

Yank caressed his beard in a perturbed way.

"Thar ain't a shadder o' doubt but we are in an egregious nest o' cut-throats," he replied. "Dan City has a bad name. It has been said that them as rools the town carry on with a high hand, an' them as ain't in the clique do wal ter keep away. Tain't a noisy, b'isterous town, like some Western places, Dan City ain't; the atrocious business is done hyar in a secret, underhand way. The murderers mark a man, an' his breath an' life goes out like a candle."

"You speak calmly, but I am sure you do not feel that way, Nevermiss. As for me, I am full of almost overpowering indignation."

"It's right that ye should be, lad."

"That, however, will not help Severn."

"I doubt ef anything on 'arth kin help the unfortunit young fellow now, but I know o' three individuoals erbout our size who kin try most egregiously. Yas, we'll buckle on our armor an' see what we kin do."

"Your hand, old friend. I felt sure you would not turn a deaf ear to this stranger's case."

"It can't be said o' the Yellowbirds that they are onfeelin'; from the time when my grandfather's uncle, David, went out an' slew Herod with a dornick he cracked outer a sling, we've be'n tryin' ter help the desarvin' who was in tribulation. We'll sartainly look inter Severn's case, but afore we kick up any great dust I want ter see ef that man o' the lightnin' tongue, Phineas French, gits any p'ints. We mustn't forgit that we are hyar ter help two gals by the name o' Dahlgren."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

LATE in the afternoon of the next day Yank and Bronx were moving along the ridge at a point east of Dan City. Their movements were aimless; they had left the village chiefly because they wanted to be wholly away from it for a time. No light had been thrown upon Ralph Severn's disappearance, and it was clear that no effort was being made to find him.

It was equally clear that they had aroused suspicion against themselves by speaking of the matter. No one had since addressed them on the subject, but they had not failed to see that more than one pair of eyes rested upon them suspiciously and threateningly.

"The powers that were" at Dan City had marked them, and Nevermiss was free to say that it would be strange if some step was not taken to remove them, as Ralph Severn had been removed.

Bronx and Yank, wandering on as before mentioned, suddenly came upon a peculiar scene. An abrupt turn in the gulch they were following brought them to a small recess. In this blazed a still smaller fire, by the side of which two men were sitting. They were eating with singular rapidity.

At first glance this seemed only a common scene, but the more the observers looked, the more they were inclined to think that it was out of the ordinary course of events.

The men by the fire were superlatively ragged; in fact, one of them was so far advanced in this condition that the covering of his person had nearly lost all form. His coat and other garments might have been such, or might have been mere rags, collected and tied together. It was hard to say which they were.

Besides this the men were wild of aspect as regarded hair and beard. Combs and brushes they had evidently abandoned, and they were in a state of disorder striking to behold.

Add the fact that they were eating with the voracity of starving men, and it will be seen that they were curiosities.

Yank and Bronx looked for some time in silence, and then the latter turned to the mountaineer.

"What have we here?" he asked.

"Name 'em, an' you kin have 'em," Yank replied.

"Are they madmen?"

"I consait not."

"Surely, they are not Danites."

"No."

The mountaineer answered absently and Bronx saw that his face was grave and thoughtful.

"You have a theory, Nevermiss. What is it?"

"I was wonderin'," was the slow reply, "ef my idee was right. Them men seem ter be suf'rin' fur want o' food an' raiment, ter put it poetical; yet hyar they be only a short ways from Dan City. Why don't they go thar? Yes, why?—unless they're afeerd ter go. Why should they be afeerd? Jes' so—why? What else could

make 'em afeerd 'ceptin' that they are victims o' the Dan City system o' atrocity?"

"By Jupiter! there may be something in that theory. I can think of no other, if they are sane."

"We'll speak ter them. Come on!"

Yank threw his rifle over his shoulder and they advanced. The strangers were still eating like half-famished dogs gnawing at bones, and they remained unconscious of everything around them. Yank and Bronx reached the fire before they were seen; then one of the strangers gave a yell, and both bounded to their feet.

It was clear that they were very much frightened, and in a mood to go, but the pocket in the cliff hemmed them in, and they could only stand and stare with startled eyes.

"Hullo, comrades!" said Yank, genially; "how goes it? Been humorin' the inside man, I see. Wal, that's right; never neglect yer stomachs. I don't, though mine is often so egregiously greedy that it keeps me at it all the time. Wal, how be ye, anyhow?"

One of the men had grown less frightened, unless his looks belied him, and was looking at Yank earnestly.

"Life of me!" he returned, "you look not like bad men."

"Land o' Goshen! I hope not."

"Yet it is from Dan City you are."

"Not much, we ain't; we're free men an' sojourners o' the hills o' promise, an' valleys o' peace."

"Do you mean to me to tell that it is not you who from Dan City are?" demanded the man, with increased earnestness.

"We—ain't—from—Dan—City!" Yank distinctly replied.

"Truth that lives! am I this safe to believe?"

The stranger grew dramatically excited, and began to gesticulate freely. He spoke with a slight accent, yet the chief thing which proclaimed him a foreigner was the peculiar way in which he arranged his words.

"You're safe as mice," the mountaineer answered. "We ain't Mormons, an' I don't b'lieve you be."

The man extended his hand pathetically.

"Oh! gentlemen, that are kind, upon me have pity!" he exclaimed. "Sore trouble am I in, and my heart with grief is heavy. It is not myself I am, for like a child am I weak in mind and body. Oh! life of me, I was but a minute ago a man that starved. I have now eaten, but I am a man alone, and great peril am I in. Gentlemen, I beg that on me you will have pity."

Tears began to course down his cheeks.

"I take it you're in some egregious tribulation," observed Yank.

"Truth that lives! I am a man deceived; I starve; I am of my life in peril, and of my daughters robbed."

"Robbed o' yer da'rters?" repeated Nevermiss, with fresh interest.

"My words I speak truly. Alas! my children!"

"Mister, what might be yer name?"

"I am Erik Dahlgren, the unfortunate!"

"Land o' Goshen! An' yer da'rters—what be they named?"

"It is Lovis and Inza they are called. But, gentlemen—good, kind gentlemen!—I see that in your faces to name which I do not know how. Life of me! do you my children know?"

He was growing more excited, and his hands flew in strange gestures, but there was nothing about him to indicate that he was mentally unbalanced; he was a foreigner, and even Yank had seen enough of men from Continental Europe to expect wild gesticulation in crises.

"I consait I've heerd on 'em," was the reply.

"And they—oh! to me tell that they are alive and well!" and the tears flowed more rapidly than ever down Dahlgren's bearded face.

"They are alive; we b'lieve they're wal."

"Gentlemen, that are kind, I thank you; I bless you!" cried Dahlgren, and then he shook hands with both of them fervently. "But of my children tell me at once!"

"Wait a bit, Erik; wait a bit. Who's this with ye?"

The mountaineer directed his gaze to the second man in rags, who had relapsed into a stupid state.

"I know not; I was in the hills wandering with starvation when I came upon this man, from a dead mountain-sheep eating. I cannot him understand, and I think he is here not right."

Dahlgren touched his forehead significantly.

"Mister, who be ye?" continued Yank, looking at the unknown.

"Scalping Knife!" muttered the man, listlessly.

"Skulpin'-Knife, eh? Wal, that's rayther a queer name, but I don't know why it ain't jest as good as Jones, or Brown, or Smith."

"We shall all starve!" added the wanderer, hoarsely.

"No need o' that. Hyar's half a sheep, though I judge it was killed a good twenty-hours ago."

"The way is dark!" muttered Scalping-Knife, looking at Yank with a timid, mournful, wistful expression.

"I consait it is dark fur some on us, who I could name. Whar did ye come from, mister, anyhow?"

"Scalping-Knife!" was the absent reply, and then the speaker sat down on the ground and began to draw lines in the sand with the blade of a long knife.

"Like that he is all the time," explained Dahlgren, with a heavy sigh. "I can from his talk make nothing. He is in his head not right, and at it I do not wonder. The things that around here occur may well the reason wreck."

"You're right, by hurley! An' now, Dahlgren, ef you don't mind, I'd like ter hear yer story; you needn't be afeerd ter trust us. This hyar is Bronx Hendershot, a man whose skin an' heart is white, so ter say; while as fur me, I'm Yank Yellowbird, an' thar never has be'n any blots on the fam'ly pedigree."

"Life of me! are you Yank Yellowbird?" cried Dahlgren.

"To be sure."

"Now, indeed, am I thankful. Of you I have heard as the honestest man of the West, and as a lion brave; and to Heaven I give thanks that with you I have met!"

The Swede shook hands again with Yank, and his sad face grew much brighter.

The mountaineer modestly stated that the picture of himself was somewhat overdrawn, and then managed to get Dahlgren seated and at work on his story.

"My name, as you already know, it is Erik Dahlgren," he began, "and in Sweden I was born, but long ago to this country I came with my bride. Here were my children born—Louis and Inza—in Michigan. Would that there we had stayed! But some months ago to us came an agent of the Mormons of Dan City, and to me they told how rich I could get if to this place I came.

"Life of me! why was I so foolish that I believel! But they said not all here were Mormons, and I need not one be, and that rich I would surely grow. Came we on, and joined a wagon-train to over the hills travel; but on the way one night we were attack, by who I, know not, for I early in the fight was stricken down so heavy that my sense's left me.

"When to myself I came I in a gulch lay on top of two dead men; they had butchered been with rifle-balls. I find the place where the attack was made, and as I learn the wagons were burned. But save me and the men who were dead all have disappeared, and knew I then that a foul deed have been done.

"I think me of my Lovis and Inza, who to me were more than my life dear, and I vow to find them or die while I try. But I have not a rifle, or a revolver, and in the hills I near starve; and when Dan City I see, oh! truth that lives! it is a Mormon town of wickedness and dare I not go there.

"So around the place I hang, and watch—watch—watch for them, but always in vain; and to me comes no friend, and hunger is hard upon me. You I meet with a heart that was heavy, for then I despair to my children find!"

This story was told with a broken voice, with tears, and almost constant gesticulation. Once Erik Dahlgren had been strong of mind and body, but both had been weakened by the sufferings he had undergone.

"It's an atrocious shame!" declared Yank, bringing his broad hand forcibly down upon his knee, "but it's jest about the way things is generally done at Dan City. Reminds me o' the state o' affairs Shadrach Yellowbird found when he cleaned out a Mormon named Bluebeard—this was in old times—it does, by hurley, though I never seen Bluebeard."

"Life of me! my poor children!" murmured Dahlgren.

"Cheer up, mister, cheer up! I bring ye news o' yer gals," encouragingly replied the veteran.

"Ahl is it so? Oh! say it once more, kind Mr. Yellowbird."

"Bronx, hyar, an' I hev b'en lookin' inter this thing, an' we b'lieve we hev located Lovis an' Inza. They're at Dan City, an' captives, but they're safe up ter present time."

"Prisoners!"

"I consait they be, an' in the house o' one Joe Lovering, chief snake o' the reptile brood."

"His name they used to make me come to this place," said Dahlgren. "Truth that lives! this proves all that I have feared."

"Don't be cast down. Bear up! Them gals are goin' ter be rescood, by hurley!"

"Ahl! gentlemen that are kind, say you that true this shall be? Say you my children to me shall be restored?"

"I say it, an' what's more ter the p'int, I mean it. This very night we propose ter strike ter save 'em. Fack, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOX BY THE CLIFF.

DAHLGREN insisted upon shaking hands with his new friends for the third time, and then they gave him some idea of the situation of affairs at Dan City.

They believed that they had definite news of Lovis and Inza. Phineas French, continuing his efforts to sell his unrivaled toilet articles—

and also keeping his eyes open for other things—bad gained information which convinced even Yank that the girls were in Joseph Lovering's second house; the one where he kept his immediate family; the one to which Isabel would not go.

According to what Phineas had heard, one of the sisters was intended for Lovering, and the other for the second great man of the town, Aaron Hicks; but they had refused to accept the fate marked out for them, and matters stood exactly as they did when the girls were first imprisoned.

Having learned this, Yank and Bronx decided to make a desperate effort to rescue them.

It was clear that the two men could not long remain in Dan City. From the first they had been objects of suspicion, and since Ralph Seven's disappearance the black looks showered upon them admitted of but one construction.

A storm was brewing. If they were wise they would strike the first blow, and try to get Lovis and Inza away.

All this they explained to Dahlgren, and he was full of gratitude. Better than all, he grew more resolute every minute, and it was clear that he would prove no small factor in the game.

Of course "Scalping-Knife" was not to be thought of in this connection. Who he was none of them knew, and his mental condition was not such as to make himself useful in the least.

While they talked he sat and drew lines in the sand with his knife. At times he raised his head, ceased work, and gazed fixedly at vacancy. Something like a gleam of reason would then appear in his face, but it speedily vanished, and he resumed his singular occupation.

Bronx noticed that there was some regularity about his work in the sand, and moved around to where he could view it. Scalping-Knife looked up with a mild, child-like smile; his former fear seemed all gone.

Bronx saw that he had drawn a picture in the sand. There was a kneeling man who held some singular object in his hand, and just back of him was something in coil. It was like a snake, and, the observer thought, represented such a reptile about to strike.

All this was like boyish amusement, and Bronx did not give it serious thought. Scalping-Knife, however, looked up at him with the mild smile before noticed.

"The picture on the rock!" he murmured.

"I see," replied Bronx, to humor him.

"Who can pick the lock?"

"Who, indeed!"

"The way is dark."

"It is fatally dark for you, my poor fellow!" replied Bronx, pityingly.

"You will not forget!" added the man, a sudden shade of anxiety on his face.

"I will not forget what I know, certainly."

"We'd better leave hyar," interrupted Bronx. "The place is ruther public, an' whar we're liable ter be happened on, an' I consait it wouldn't be wal fur Dahlgren ter be see'd. It might kick up an egregious muss."

They started toward the north, and Nevermiss added:

"Thar is one thing I don't onnerstan', at all, Dahlgren."

"And that is what?"

"Why yer train was attacked. You an' the rest was gathered furder east by the Mormon agents, ter stock up Dan City. Why, then, did the atrocious insex fall outer ye, an' wipe out the hull emigrant party?"

"Now I can answer not at all."

"Any treasure in the train?"

"No. We all were poor."

"It's a good bit myster'us. You was as good as members o' the town, an' would 'a' been a welcome reinforcement, but they wiped ye out. Why?"

"I can only fear me it was to get my daughters."

"Not much, it wa'n't. Ef you'd all settled thar they would hev hed the onfortinit gals fully in t heir power, so why kick up a disturbance? Now, them insex ain't fools enough ter bite off their own noses, ef it does seem they've did it, an' thar is something back o' all this. Egregious mysterious, by hurley! Looks as though they was afraid ter let the train git thar safe."

"I cannot at all explain it," replied Dahlgren, shaking his head.

While they walked side by side in conversation, Bronx and Scalping-Knife brought up the rear. The deranged man had taken a fancy to Hendershot, and his former timidity had given place to a child-like confidence in his new friend. He was inclined to follow him like an humble dog, and his melancholy, wistful manner impressed Bronx deeply.

The stranger's condition was pitiful.

The quartette went on until, as they were passing through a gulch, Yank suddenly came to a halt.

"Land o' Goshen!" the veteran exclaimed, "what hav we hyar? Didn't know we was in an art-gallery, by hurley!"

He was looking at the cliff, and Bronx and Dahlgren followed his example. What they saw was new and of temporary interest, at least, to them; it was the picture and unfinished

inscription which Gold Gauntlet saw on his way to Dan City.

"Life of me!" exclaimed Dahlgren, "what means this thing so strange?"

"It's a paintin' by some old master, I consait," replied Yank, "an' I declare it's wal done. I'm competent ter jedge on sech a matter, fur I once worked fur an artist. He had a gallery a hundu'd, or more, foot long, an' 'twas full o' pictures he had painted an' wanted ter sell. 'Twas ter be my job ter show 'em, s'plain ter customers what they was, an' try ter git 'em interested so they would buy. I got my lesson down fine the fu'st evenin', an' when a rich millionaire called next mornin' I was in fine condition fur business. Smith, the artist, was very busy, but he winked at me, an' tol' me ter take the rich feller in an' give the pictur's a good send-off. We went, an' the customer p'inted his cane at a paintin', an' sez he:

"What's that?"

"That," sez I, as prompt as a parrot, "is a bit o' scenery sketched in New Jersey. It represents Adam an' Eve in the Garding o' Eden, an' was painted by Mr. Smith fur a man named Mike Angelo."

The customer looked a bit dazed, but he p'inted ter the next in order.

"What's that?" sez he.

"Another Jersey scene," sez I; "it shows Abraham sacrificin' his son, Noah. Mr. Smith did it fur a man named Rafferty—no; that ain't the name—Raphael."

The customer looked hard at me, but made no comments.

"An' that?" sez he, p'intin' ag'in.

"That," sez I, as chipper as you please, "is the plague o' frogs. Smith did it fur a Mr. Murillo. He got the scenery in Jersey, but I dunno whar he did git the frogs. Thar is an egregious pile on 'em, ain't thar?" sez I.

"Young man, this is amazin'," sez he.

"So 'tis, by hurley!" sez I. "Them frogs is most atrocious funny critters."

"Are you sure thar ain't no mistake?" sez he.

"They may be toads," sez I, willin' ter yield a p'nt.

"The next pictur'—what's that?" sez he.

"Smith did that fur a Mr. Firebrand—no, I mean Rembrandt. It shows Noah comin' out o' the Ark, down in Jersey."

"Young man," sez the customer, in an awful voice, "your master tol' me all these pictur's was by the old masters."

"Smith did paint 'em fur the old masters," sez I, though I had no idee who the old masters was.

"What, then, means this dato on the pictur' o' Noah an' the Ark—I mean the 1600 after Rembrandt's name?"

"That," sez I, at a rough guess, "is the number o' animals thar was in the Ark."

"I'll see Smith," sez he, an' he flounced out inter the other room, lookin' sorter worked-up an' flurried.

"I didn't hear the talk that follered, but pooty soon Smith come in, lookin' white as a ghost, an' carryin' a can he had picked up fur the occasion.

"You scoundrel!" sez he, in a voice like a blizzard, "you've ruined me; you've let on that these pictur's ain't by the old masters. You've give my racket away, but, by hurley, I'll make you sore fur it!"

"An' with that he fell onto me with his cane an' give me a most egregious thrashin'. I don't know ter to-day what he was mad about, but he whaled me 'round the room until we knocked down the pictur' o' Adam an' Eve in the Garding o' Eden. By that time I was jest a little wrathy myself, an' I kicked 'Adam in the stum-mick, puttin' my foot right through his jacket—which was a cur'us one, an' didn't begin ter cover him up properly—an' then I scud out o' the atrocious gallery. Next day I concluded that I knowed enough erbout that business, an' never went back. I consait that Smith was sorry ter part with me, when he'd thought it over calmly."

Toward the close of this reminiscence Bronx's attention became fixed upon Scalping-Knife.

The deranged man heard nothing that Yank was saying. He was gazing fixedly at the picture on the rock, and the old, frightened expression had reappeared on his face. His eyes were wild, and the fingers of his half-closed hands worked nervously on the dirt-covered palms.

Suddenly an idea occurred to Bronx.

Allowing for the rudeness of the means, the picture which the man had made in the sand with his knife was exactly like this one upon the rocks. He had studied it at the time, and, crude as it was, the resemblance was marked.

He touched the unfortunate man's arm. Scalping-Knife started, but grew calmer as he met Bronx's friendly gaze.

"You have seen this before?" the latter questioned.

"It is the one," Scalping-Knife muttered.

"What do you know of it?"

"The picture on the rocks?" was the vague reply.

"Who made it?" persisted Bronx.

"The way is dark!" replied Scalping-Knife, with a shiver, and his eyes looked larger than ever.

"Can you not tell us anything about it?"
"The way is dark," repeated the man.
"Useless!"

Bronx turned away with a feeling of deep disappointment. The rock had aroused all his interest. The unfinished word-inscription, telling as it did that a dark tragedy had occurred, was second in interest only to the picture. What did that mean? The kneeling men; the anchor-shaped object he held in his hand; the lasso flying toward him—all these, Bronx felt sure, had a history.

What it was he could not surmise.

It was an additional mystery to the secrets of Dan City and vicinity.

His interest in the matter did not abate, and while Yank and Dahlgren dismissed the picture, he used his eyes and reasoning faculties.

The human skeleton still lay where Gold Gauntlet had seen it, and seemed to have close connection with the untold tragedy. It was, it seemed more than likely, what remained of the victim of the tragedy. Bronx had at first thought that the picture was done in blood, but on closer examination he decided that it was paint used by an artist.

This suggested the idea that some wandering painter had done all this in an idle moment, but the possibility was soon discarded; life and events around Dan City were too real, too tragic and fraught with peril, to admit of his looking upon this half-told story as an idle jest.

Yank Yellowbird had not outwardly seemed to take so much interest in the matter, but he suddenly broke off in the middle of a sentence addressed to Dahlgren, and walked to the skeleton.

Stooping, he picked up something from the ground. It was a small, oblong tin-box, not much larger than his thumb, but he gazed at it very earnestly.

"Is it a clew, Nevermiss?" asked Bronx.

"Lad, what was the name o' that fever-struck young feller who disappeared so myster'us?"

"Ralph Severn."

The mountaineer shook his head slowly.

"He tol' ye on a brother o' his, who had disappeared equally myster'us. What was his name?"

"I don't remember that it was mentioned. But why do you ask? Have you—"

"Look at this!"

Yank passed over the box, pointing to one particular point, and as he did so Bronx saw a name scratched upon the surface of the tin. It was easily read:

"Morgan Severn!"

Without pronouncing the name, Bronx looked quickly at the mountaineer.

"What do you make of this, Nevermiss?"

"The sick man had a brother who come hyar ahead o' him, an' then vanished from sight, didn't he?"

"So he said."

"Wal, by hurley, ef the pictur' on the rock, an' the name on his box, an' the skeleton, don't tell a tale, what does? I b'lieve Morgan Severn is dead!"

A sharp cry broke from Scalping-Knife's lips, and he ran toward the speaker like one in frenzy.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRACES OF A TRAGEDY.

YANK YELLOWBIRD seemed in danger of being overturned by this impetuous rush, but Scalping-Knife came to a halt a few feet away. The deranged man's face was pale, and his eyes were wilder than usual, but on his bronzed face was an expression of actual intelligence. The mountaineer could see that he trembled violently.

"What?—what?" he cried, a distinct pause between the two excitedly-spoken words.

No one had an immediate reply ready, and the look of intelligence faded away. His face became more blank and dull than ever, and he passed his hand over his head as though in pain.

"What in hurley does the creetur' mean?" asked Yank, in perplexity.

"It was the name, I think," Bronx replied. "My man, did you know Morgan Severn?"

Scalping-Knife looked at the speaker in the old way.

"Who can pick the lock?" he muttered, vaguely.

"You know something about this picture, don't you?—something about Morgan Severn?"

A wild, meaningless smile crossed the wanderer's face.

"You are my friend; I am your friend," he said, slowly.

"Might as wal try ter git information from a rock, by hurley!" declared the mountaineer.

"It's egregious melancholy ter see a man in his fix. I consait that I know what the trouble is; he looks like a person who's a victim o' malignant newrolgy, an' he's got it bad. It's an atrocious thing, newrolgy is, when it rages with voylence. I've had it, man an' boy, fur goin' on forty year, an' I know. Thar ain't a bone in my body but has be'n broke five or six times, an' all by that complaint. Luckily, the Yellowbirds' bones knit quick, an' I ain't none the wuss for't."

Yank caressed his sparse beard contentedly, but Bronx's face was graver.

"I believe, Nevermiss, that if this fellow had his senses he could throw light on one mystery. I cannot but believe that we have found the remains of Ralph Severn's brother in this lonely place. Scalping-knife, as we call him, knew of this picture on the rocks before we came here. What is more likely than that he knew Morgan Severn, and that this cloud came upon his mind afterward?"

"That's reason in that, I consait."

"I will talk with him further."

Bronx proceeded to do so, and by various artifices tried to summon back that lost intelligence which had flashed for a moment on Scalping-Knife's face. It was a vain attempt. The man paid close attention, much as a faithful dog would have done, but with less of reason and understanding.

It was a hopeless task.

When Bronx abandoned it, Yank Yellowbird led them along once more. They still had some time upon their hands, and he knew of a place where he thought they would be safe from observation.

It was near Dan City Reservation, but in a place so wild that he believed no intruder would appear.

It was at the end of a gulch, which narrowed to a tunnel, with alternate sections of rocky roof and blue sky to meet the gaze of whoever looked upward. Gigantic fragments of rock, nearly all flat rather than round, were scattered about, some lying flat, some standing on edge, and still others leaning diagonally against their neighbors—a wild scene, indeed, as though the mountain had once been rent by a vast explosion. Grass there was none, and the only thing that was green were the bushes, strong, but dwarfed and misshapen, that clung to crevices here and there.

The mountaineer led them to a point where a great rocky slab covered the now narrow gulch, and they sat down on the rocks in the semi-darkness.

Conversation turned to a subject of vital interest to Erik Dahlgren—the rescue of Lovis and Inza.

Yank had fully formed the plan for their rescue, and he and Bronx had only been awaiting night to make the attempt. To Trail-Lifter they had given the task of caring for their horses, for there was a possibility that they would be molested.

Dahlgren listened and talked, and his heart went out to his new friends. He was gaining new strength and new courage, and would be no small factor in the case, but he leaned upon Yank. He had heard of this fearless man, and he would be just the one to take charge in an attempt to rescue the daughters the unfortunate Swede loved so well.

For an hour the matter was discussed in all its bearings.

After awhile Hendershot noticed that Yank's attention often strayed for a moment, and he seemed to listen carefully. As the veteran did not explain, he finally spoke abruptly.

"Is there danger, Nevermiss?"

"Danger?"

"Yes."

"Why do ye ask?"

"Something is on your mind; you hear something."

"I consait that I do."

"What is it?"

"Jest what I want ter know, an' ef ye don't object, I'll move erlong inter this egregious hole an' see ef I kin explain it. By the way, lad, how close d'ye s'pose we be ter Dan City Reservation?"

"Very near, certainly, though this tunnel prevents accurate estimates. Can it be, Yank, that you hear—"

He paused, and the mountaineer replied:

"Ef I ain't mistooken, I hear the same sound we heerd once afore. The atrocious newrolgy has about ruined the drum an' fife o' my ear, as a doctor would express it; but thar is some accuracy left in the wings ter my head yet."

"A good deal, if you hear anything now. I have always thought my hearing acute, but it is nothing compared to yours."

"Trainin' an' practice has did it, lad. Give yerself twenty year more on the plains an' mountains, an' you'd ekul—yes, an' beat me, no doubt; fur you're clear grit all through, while my left foot is a weak sister."

Yank had arisen, and after a pause he told the whole party to follow him. They went on in the tunnel a few yards, while it grew darker and narrower, and then the avenue ended abruptly.

Nevermiss bade them listen, and no acute hearing was necessary then. The same sound Yank and Bronx had heard when they were in Dan City Reservation was bcre to their ears—the peculiar *clink! clink!*—but no murmur of voices.

"It's the sound o' a pick, sure's you're alive!" declared the mountaineer, after a pause.

"That seems certain."

"Then we must decide that either the Mormons bev got a mine in thar, or else the bowels o' the 'arth is inhabited."

"Yes."
"Has anybody a match?"

"I have," Bronx replied.

"Strike it, an' le's hev a look."

Bronx obeyed, and by communicating the blaze to a piece of paper, they obtained as much of a survey as was necessary. There was no space wide enough to admit of passage beyond that point, though the rock was of slab-like formation, with numerous crevices between.

Through the crevices came the sound.

Clink, clank! Clink, clank!

"It is I who thinks this very strange," said Dahlgren.

"Egregious funny, by hurley, an' the more ye know on't, the more you'll naturally think so," Yank replied. "Now, ef I hadn't anything else ter occupy my time, I consait that I'd git a crow-bar an' attack these rocks. I b'lieve I could git inter the den that way."

"It is probably only a secret mine," answered Bronx.

"I ain't so sure o' that."

"What more would you expect to find?"

"Somethin' we don't suspeck. I don't jest know what, but the idee is strong in my mind that this place ain't knowed ter everybody at Dan City."

"You may be right."

"To be sure. Bronx, ef you feel that way, we'll come back arter we escort Dahlgren an' his gals ter safety, an' solve this riddle."

"I'm with you, Nevermiss."

"Ah! truth that lives!" exclaimed Dahlgren, "we have not yet to safety conducted my children."

"Fack, by hurley, an' we'll attend ter that first."

They returned to the mouth of the tunnel, and sat down to await the hour of action.

Night soon came, falling with marked darkness in the gulch, but they had longer to wait; they dared make no effort to rescue the girls until the great part of Dan City was asleep.

The time came at last when Yank led them out and toward the village. Some distance from it three of their number paused, while the mountaineer went to see Trail-Lifter, and make sure that all was right there.

He returned with a favorable report.

How to dispose of Scalping-Knife now became a question. They had tried to leave him behind, but he kept at Bronx's heels persistently—still acting like a faithful dog—and would not be left or sent away. His helplessness appealed to Bronx's pity; he spoke in his behalf; and it was finally decided that he and Dahlgren should be left behind with Trail-Lifter. Yank believed that he and Bronx could do the work as well—perhaps, better—than with a third party along.

Dahlgren acquiesced somewhat unwillingly; due arrangements were made; and then Yank and Bronx went on alone.

Little was said on the way, and silence reigned all around until they had nearly reached the village. They were among the last of the gulchers when this silence was abruptly broken. Only a few yards away sounded loud voices and a confused din, as though men were fighting.

They paused. What were they to do in this emergency? If any deserving person was in trouble they wished to aid him; if it was only a common broil, they were better wholly apart from it.

Their indecision was ended by other events. Suddenly a man came running toward them, pursued by other men. The fugitive ran well at first, but suddenly gave a cry and dropped to the ground. Then his enemies rapidly closed the gap.

"By hurley! I can't stan' this, lad!" exclaimed Yank Yellowbird. "Hyar's at 'em, fur the weaker party's sake. Wade in!"

They hastened forward at full speed, and just as the strangers bent over their intended prey, the new-comers burst upon the scene like a whirlwind.

"Let up thar, ye atrocious insex!" cried the mountaineer. "Leave that man alone, or we'll make a most egregious tribulation fur ye!"

CHAPTER XX.

FOR THE GIRLS' SAKE.

This warning was plainly spoken, but it did not prove effective. Instead, the nearest man threw up his rifle and took aim at Yank Yellowbird.

Matters came to a crisis with rapidity then. Yank had no intention of being shot, and he knew how to prevent it. Like a flash his own rifle was whirled through the air, and the would-be assassin's weapon was beaten down.

"At 'em, lad!" the mountaineer cried again, and then they sprung into the midst of the enemy.

A partial idea of Yank's prowess was then vouchsafed. He wielded his rifle like a club, and seemed absolutely to mow a path ahead of him. Men fell right and left, as before a cyclone, and in a remarkably short space of time it was all over. Not one of the enemy remained; Yank had not cared to do them great harm, and as they were in condition to flee, they went very gladly, carrying sore heads with them.

Their legs, however, seemed to be in good condition.

Bronx had been able to do but little before it was all over, but he now turned to the man they had rescued.

That person sat upright and spoke in a prompt, but very cool, voice:

"Gents, I owe you one. You are trump cards, and I thank you heartily."

"What! is it you?" cried Bronx.

"It is I, surely; but who am I?"

"Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator."

"Quiet the 'Gladiator,' if you please. I have sprained my ankle, and I am like anything but what you call me—an absurd name for me, anyhow. The village people thought I looked like a gladiator. Really, I am as meek and weak as a girl."

"Land o' Goshen! you don't seem ter know much about the female kind ef you call 'em *meek!*" exclaimed the veteran. "But that ain't ter the p'int. What was goin' on hyar?"

"Came very near being a fight."

"To be sure. So Hurlforth was arter you?"

"Ah!—you recognized him?"

"Yas."

"Well, you thumped him soundly once, to my knowledge. You did well; I thank you both."

"I take it, mister, that your standin' at Dan City ain't o' the best."

Yank was not oblivious to the fact that a strong, bold young man was before him, and he had an ambition to secure another ally.

"Wrong!" replied Gold Gauntlet; "my standin' here is good—excellent."

"Was this a proof on't?"

"Oh! these were common ruffians."

"Hurlforth is Marshal o' Dan City."

"A poor one."

"I consait so. But see hyar, mister, am I ter onderstan' that you're a Mormon?"

"Hardly that, for I am a late comer among these people, but I am so favorably impressed that I shall join them. I find them honest, industrious, noble persons, and, as I said, I intend to join."

"J'ine, an' be hanged!" exclaimed Yank, with unusual warmth. "We'll leave ye now. Hope you'll excuse our savin' ye from yer noble, honest friend Hurlforth!"

The disgusted mountaineer turned away, but Gold Gauntlet called after him:

"Wait, my friend; you're leaving me without a weapon. Loan me a revolver, will you?"

"Should sea'cely s'pose you'd want one among sech oncommon cherubs as exist 'round Dan City."

"Those men were scoundrels; I referred to the leaders of the town when I spoke. Nobody can deny that Joseph Lovering is a worthy, upright man."

"A which?"

"An honest man and a gentleman."

"Nobody kin truthfully deny it," grimly replied Yank, "but thar are *some* folks who are sech egregious liars—I won't name 'em—that they would sw'ar night was day. Thar ain't no doubt but Joe Lovering is an angel. Reckon he's got wings sprouted; leastwise, I seen a promisin' crop o' pin-feathers on his upper lip. Wal, hyar's yer revolver—good-by!"

The mountaineer broke off abruptly, and as abruptly turned away. He was supremely disgusted with Gold Gauntlet, and wanted no more to do with him. He expressed his opinion freely to Bronx as they walked away, but other matters soon demanded attention.

They neared Joseph Lovering's house.

The crisis was at hand.

The information received from Phineas French enabled them to have all planned, and at a convenient point they secured a ladder. Proceeding to the rear of the house, they leaned this against the wall so that the upper end touched a certain second-story window.

They then went up promptly.

They had expected to find the window fastened, but such proved not to be the case. Considerably surprised Yank, who was ahead, raised it; all was dark and silent beyond.

He now saw that they had forgotten one necessary thing—a light—was it too late to procure it? He cautiously crawled through the window, and Bronx followed. They were inside the house, but what was to be done next?

Matters were not as had been expected.

"We must risk a match," the mountaineer whispered. "Light one!"

Bronx obeyed, taking care not to strike it too roughly. The light came, and both used their eyes quickly. They were in a room, if such it could be called, ten feet wide, but reaching back only about four feet from the window. There were two doors, one at the end and one at the side; and as the match died out they saw a faint glow of light beneath the latter. They also saw that this door was secured with a stout bar.

Both caught the meaning of this narrow room; it was a little space partitioned off so that, whenever the door was barred, the inmate of the real room beyond could not approach the window. The second door was for the use of those who barred the door—their way of retreat.

Escape was thus made impossible without aid from the outside.

Yank's face cleared. Hope again animated him; he felt almost sure that the captive girls were beyond that barred door, and there was a strong possibility of rescuing them unless the rescuers were discovered.

There was the rub—one false step would ruin all. Perhaps, too, there was a watchful guard. Perhaps there was a female jailer in the room with the girls. Perhaps, frightened at their appearance, one of the girls would call out and destroy the last hope.

All this occurred to Yank, but he was never cooler. A sleeping volcano was a place safe enough while it continued to sleep.

"Now for it, Bronx!" he whispered.

He cautiously removed the bar.

"Remember you're ter do the fine talkin'," he added.

"I am ready."

Bronx spoke tersely, and he tried to be calm. It was no easy task, but he succeeded better than he dared hope.

The door was pushed open and they entered.

Bronx saw a well-furnished room, but at first sight he discovered nothing more except that a lamp, with the wick turned well down, stood upon the table. He paused irresolutely, but at that moment the scene suddenly changed.

Without the least warning the room was filled with light, and as he looked in surprise he saw a girl standing by the table. Clearly, she had been there when they entered, and had suddenly turned the light on, but it almost seemed that she had appeared miraculously.

He had intended to speak quickly, so as to prevent any alarm from her lips, but words did not come at his bidding. He was not only surprised by her sudden appearance, but surprised to find her so beautiful. She looked rarely lovely as she stood there, and the crown of true, pure womanhood seemed to rest upon her with its indescribable presence. Her slight, graceful figure was erect, and there was much of the heroic in her appearance.

Her expression was stern and lofty, and she put out one hand slightly and said, in a low but intense voice:

"You have not taken us by surprise, you see!"

The truth flashed upon Bronx; she believed that she saw, not rescuers, but enemies.

"Young lady, be calm!" he said, quickly. "If you are named Dahlgren, we come to you as friends. We are here to take you to your father."

She started perceptibly.

"My father!" she echoed.

"Yes, to Erik Dahlgren."

"Where is he?"

"Beyond the village, waiting for us to bring you to him."

"And who are you?"

"One word, first. Are you really one whom we seek? Speak your name!"

"I am Lovis Dahlgren, and this is my sister, Inza!"

Before this point of the dialogue a second girl had appeared not far away. She now glided forward, and the two stood side by side. Bronx could not doubt that they were sisters: they were very much alike, except that Lovis was more of a brunette than her sister.

"That settles the bull egregious business," interrupted Yank, who was too practical to approve of delay. "Your father waits fur ye, gals, an' the quicker we slide that way the better. The weak sister is gittin' nervous."

"Here is a sign that we have come from Erik Dahlgren, your father," added Bronx.

He advanced and handed a ring to Lovis. She looked at it once, and then slipped it upon her own finger.

"It is my father's!" she said, softly, and then, arousing, she added in a more practical tone: "I doubt you no longer, and we are ready to go. Ready to go! I cannot express the joy that is in my heart. May God bless you, and— But lead on, lead on!"

"To be sure," replied Yank. "I don't want ter stay hyar, either. I was born with antipathies, an' they will stick to me."

There was but little to do in the way of preparation, for the girls had nothing there except their outer garments which were their own. They were ready in a very short time.

The retreat was successfully made. The door was re-barred behind them; the window was closed and the ladder put away; and then they hastened along through the village.

Bronx had given his arm to Lovis, and he had never been more zealous in a good purpose. He felt that he had a real treasure to protect. Few words were spoken as they went, for they expected at every step to be confronted by some enemy.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WORD OF WARNING.

The dreaded alarm did not come, and though Yank Yellowbird, remembering that Hurlforth and his men were abroad, kept constant watch, he saw no living creature, human or otherwise, until the village was passed. Both Lovis and Inza were exhibiting an amount of courage which aroused the admiration of their rescuers, and the flight was well begun.

The mountaineer led the way to where Dahlgren, Trail-Lifter and Scalping-Knife waited, and the girls were soon in their father's arms.

His emotional nature showed more strongly than ever then, and he applied to them every tender term he could think of—terms which Bronx Hendershot thought very appropriate.

Yank stroked his beard and looked on approvingly, but he did not forget their situation, and gave them only a comparatively brief time to talk.

"Wal, good folks," he said, interrupting the Swede, "we will be off now. You kin finish explanations arter we're in the saddle, Dahlgren. Little gals, hyar are two bosses fur you which we've picked up by the way. I hope you're good riders. Climb up, all on ye. Skulpin'-Knife, I hope ye'll behave like a gentleman. Now foller me—Still-Tongue will bring up the rear. Bronx, you'd better keep nigh the gals, ef 'tain't too much trouble."

A humorous smile flitted over the mountaineer's face at his last idea, but as they moved away, he at once became the watchful scout again.

During the first mile of their flight they would be liable to meet Hurlforth's Danites at any step. Such an encounter might immediately result disastrously to them. If it did not, it would serve to hasten the inevitable pursuit.

Thus the journey was begun under circumstances far from reassuring. The dark gulches might hold enemies who would slaughter the male fugitives if they could.

All this the leaders recognized, but not even a transient feeling of fear visited the minds of Bronx, Yank or the young Modoc; they were accustomed to scenes like this.

Yank's grim joke did not prevent Bronx from taking his place beside Lovis. He had grown doubly zealous since he had seen this fair girl. Before, he had regarded her as being only a woman in peril; even Erik Dahlgren's statement that he had come to the United States before the girls were born had not dispelled the vague idea that they were only emigrant girls lately from Europe.

Former impressions had been swept away, however, and he knew when he first saw them that they were refined, intelligent girls, who, having lived all their lives in America, had all the ways of its people, and to natural mental ability had added good educations.

This was not the only impression Lovis produced upon him, and it was a real pleasure to ride beside her, and see her look to him for protection.

Yank once more showed his border-craft. He kept somewhat ahead of the others, and was always keenly on the alert. His mind was as much at ease as ever, and had any one been riding beside him, he would probably have found some remark to make about his alleged neuralgia, or his cowardly left foot.

Despite this he never relaxed his vigilance. His small gray eyes were never at rest, and no audible sound escaped his acute hearing.

He knew that if they chanced upon the Danites bloodshed would follow, and was prepared to do his utmost for the girls they had thus far been able to help.

Each yard that they advanced was cause for new hopes. The gulches did not seem to hold lurking foes. There was yet some hope of getting a good start.

The first mile was covered; a second was added; and then Yank fell back and joined his companions.

"Ab! life of me!" exclaimed Dahlgren, "is it with us all right, Mr. Yellowbird?"

"I consait so."

"Sir, we have to thank you for much—very much."

"Wait awhile, Dahlgren. We won't crow until we're beyond the reach o' the atrocious insex."

"Is it you that thinks they in pursuit are coming?"

"Can't say, fur sure. I hope the egregious critters won't diskiver the facks until mornin', in which case we shall have summat o' a start."

"We have not lately seen the Indian you call Trail-Lifter near us."

"Never mind him. Thar ain't one on us more capable o' lookin' out fur hisself than Still-Tongue. I've come back ter see ef the gals kin tell me what's become o' the rest o' yer ill-fated wagon-train."

"We have just been talking about it," answered Lovis. "No; we know nothing."

"Wa'n't any other captives taken ter Dan City?"

"Not to our knowledge. As soon as the train was captured, Inza and I were given to a small escort and taken quickly to the village."

"An' you ain't seen the others sence?"

"No."

"Was the fightin' over when you was taken away?"

"Oh! yes."

"An' others was left alive?"

"Yes. Only a few were killed, I think; but I don't know what happened afterward."

"I don't," Yank replied, "but I kin give a pooty reliable guess."

"My poor fellow men that were deluded!"

exclaimed Dahlgren. "Where do you think they now are?"

"Twouldn't s'prise me an artom ef they're in Dan City Reservation, or under it, ruther. I've had an idee this might be the case for some time."

"Truth that lives! do you think they it was we heard at mining, when in the tunnel we were?"

"I consait it may be so."

"But why do they this thing?"

"Mebbe they can't help it. My idee is that the atrocious insex has got 'em thar as slaves."

It was an entirely new idea to Dahlgren, and he said as much, but it was the only way in which Yank could explain the disappearance of the other members of the wagon-train party. All the latest evidence went to show that there had been no general massacre, or, if there had been such, it was delayed until Lovis and Inza were taken away.

"Dahlgren," pursued the mountaineer, with more than usual earnestness, "you say that you was knocked sensible in the fracas, an' when ye come ter yer senses you'd be'n dumped inter a gulch for dead?"

"Life of me! this fact is true."

"Who knocked ye sensible?"

"Really, I know this not, good sir."

"Did you—now pay strick attention—did you see any sign ter show that you was especially singled out in the fight?—that they was oncommon greedy to hit you, more than any other man?"

This was an unexpected question, and Dahlgren wisely took time to consider.

"Your words and meaning are to me strange," he finally replied, "but I know only that around me were men on all sides, and that to beat me down they zealous seemed. Like a cloud they were, and fight all I could not at once, but I know not but with the other emigrants it was like this, the same."

"You say that you don't know of any enemy of yours at Dan City?" asked Bronx, whose mind was evidently running in the same channel as Yank's.

"I did not of any know."

"Hev ye an inemy anyhar?" continued the mountaineer. "Is thar any one you kin think on who hates ye bad?"

Dahlgren shook his head.

"I know not of such a man."

"Wal, we'll let it rest fur now, for we sarainly bev enough else ter think on."

Yank once more rode to the front. He had marked out their line of flight before that night, and it was now followed. Various landmarks served as guides, and they were not obliged to stop and study the route. Fair progress was made, considering that the way was so wild and rough, but the astute leader took good care not to ask too much of the horses in such a place.

Bronx Hendershot managed to enjoy that ride, despite the fact that the future was full of danger. He found both Lovis and Inza bright, pleasant girls, and no better company could be desired.

Scalping-Knife was always to be found at Bronx's heels. His dog-like devotion to the young man never wavered; he hung to him persistently. At the same time he was quiet and unobtrusive, and, beyond muttering to himself now and then, had nothing to say.

Hours passed; the night drew near its end.

An hour before daybreak they left the hills behind for a time. A prairie, broken by occasional groups of trees, lay before them. Here Yank decided that they would rest for awhile, beside a small stream of water. Trail-Lifter joined them, and as he had seen no suspicious signs, they went into camp. Food for themselves had been brought along, and there was good grazing for the horses.

When day dawned they resumed their journey at increased speed. Beyond this point not one of them had ever been, and they must literally explore as they went. They must trust to luck, and Yank Yellowbird's sagacity, to take them through safely.

For three hours they rode without adventure. By that time they reached another range of hills. To continue on the prairie they must deviate from the course they had been following, and go north. Should this be done, or should they take to the hills?

To settle the matter Yank called a halt, and himself dismounted and began climbing to an elevated point of the ridge. He soon reached it. Pausing there, he looked back over the course they had just come.

He expected to see something, and his fears were unhappily verified.

Other horsemen were on the prairie—one, two, three parties. All were traveling northeast. One was following the trail of the fugitives. Of the others, one had directed its course a little further north; the other a little further south.

In brief, the Danites were on the track, and they had spread out like a fan to destroy the fugitives' last hope. They were nearer than Yank had expected, and a shadow of uneasiness appeared on his face. He and his party must meet great odds in a place where he knew of no refuge. The prospect was dark!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SILVER ANCHOR.

GOLD GAUNTLET was seated in his hut, placidly smoking a cigar. He looked none the worse for his adventures of the previous night, and was really little affected thereby, though a slight lameness still remained in his ankle.

After being kidnapped, as before related, he was subjected to cross-examination at Hurlforth's hands. The latter trusted to his mask, and a change of voice, to hide his identity, but before the interview was half over, Gold Gauntlet had discovered who he was.

This fact the Gladiator did not betray.

Hurlforth wanted information; he wanted to know what "game" Gold Gauntlet was "playing at Lovering's." The prisoner denied that there was any game, and then he was accused of being a spy; of having come to Dan City with some purpose in mind hostile to the Mormons.

All this was because crafty Hurlforth really did have a suspicion that there was underhand work somewhere. He loved Isabel, in his rude way, and Joseph knew it. But he was not a favored suitor, though Joseph had made certain promises. Possibly Joseph had combined with Gold Gauntlet in some scheme; at any rate, the Gladiator must have a plot in mind.

Such was Hurlforth's opinion, and he set out to verify it. He aspired to get a confession from his prisoner; he tried to trap him into an admission; he coaxed, threatened, flourished a revolver in Gold Gauntlet's face, and tried various other means.

He failed; there was no confession.

Only one thing remained to be done, Hurlforth thought, and that was to dispose of the Gladiator promptly, permanently.

Attempting to conduct Gold Gauntlet to the place where he was to be slain, the prisoner escaped; they pursued, and were overtaken and beaten off by Yank Yellowbird and Bronx.

Gold Gauntlet had limped back to his hut, and there he still was. His ankle gave him no uneasiness, and he would have been as much at ease as ever had not he been aware that he had a powerful enemy in Dan City.

Hurlforth stood next to Lovering and Hicks in the village.

Personally he had no fear of the dark-faced marshal, and would have been only too glad to settle their difference at once, but trouble with Hurlforth bade fair to interfere with all his plans for the future.

Once let Lovering turn against him, and the hopes of years would perish. He had come to Dan City with a great work to do, and it was one which required careful, patient work.

If Hurlforth destroyed his chances, he would be avenged upon the marshal, but that would not undo the damage; all depended upon keeping Lovering's good-will. It was because of this that the Gladiator had refused the advances of Yank Yellowbird the previous night. Nobody knew better than he what a villain Lovering was, but he could not show his hand to the world then.

For the present he would rather have Lovering for a friend than any other man.

The Gladiator arose, and, finding his ankle in better condition than he had expected, walked slowly to where he found pasture for his horse. It was a little valley for which no one else seemed to have any use, and the placing of a slight obstruction, at a certain point, kept the animal from wandering away.

He had felt some doubt that the horse was now safe, but it vanished when he reached the valley.

The black horse was grazing contentedly.

Between master and brute existed an unusual affection, and with this in mind, Gold Gauntlet passed the obstruction and entered the valley. Then the horse saw him and came down at rapid speed to crave notice. He did not seek in vain; the Gladiator petted him all that he could wish.

Half an hour passed. The horse had wandered away, and Gold Gauntlet, to rest his ankle, was lying upon the ground. At that point the black horse had evidently found the grass particularly palatable, for it was eaten down until there was little more than a carpet of green.

That there was anything else there of interest Gold Gauntlet did not suspect until, deciding to return to his hut, he made the first motion to rise.

The second motion was not made then; his gaze suddenly fell upon something which arrested his movements. He lowered his hand to the ground, picked up something—silver, yet not silver in its crude state. To him it was even more interesting, even if it did not promise a mine near at hand.

He held in his hand an ornament, toy or curiosity—whatever it was intended for—made of silver and shaped like an anchor. It was singular, for ornaments and curiosities were rare in Dan City, and when he had fully seen what it was, his first emotions were those of surprise.

The anchor was about four inches long, and perfectly formed, except that the flukes seemed to be somewhat dwarfed. The handiwork was not that of a novice. Whoever had made it

possessed skill and proper tools, and had done his work well.

"But how came it here, in a rock-locked Utah valley?" muttered Gold Gauntlet, putting his thoughts in words. "This is too heavy and cumbersome for a woman's trinket, and the men of Dan City are not given to the wearing of ornaments. It's odd that this anchor—"

He suddenly ceased speaking; his expression grew more thoughtful.

He had suddenly remembered the day that he came to Dan City, and what he saw by the way; he had remembered the picture rocks. Had he found a coincidence? Upon the rock had been painted a man holding an anchor at full length. At the time he had wondered at it, but more important affairs had nearly driven all recollection from his mind until this last event.

Anchors, people who had interest in them, or who actually knew anything about them, were not common so far from any ocean.

"Surely this region can't be full of anchors, and things associated with anchors," Gold Gauntlet thought, "and it would be likely, rather than the reverse, that there was a connection between the two. But how did this thing get here? Who lost it? What connection has it with the affair hinted at in the rock-picture?"

He had begun his return to his hut, and he now put the anchor safely away in his pocket.

"I'll hold on to this concern; it may yet prove to be of great importance. According to the legend of the rocks a tragedy has occurred to some one, but who it was I haven't any idea. It would be hard to tell by means of what was so incompletely painted there, but this silver anchor may yet prove a real clew. I'll hang to it, surely!"

His thoughts wandered on, and he remembered the visit that the half-witted man had made him in the gulch. This person's talk had led Gold Gauntlet to believe that he knew something about the pictures on the rock.

He had, however, completely disappeared from the Gladiator's knowledge, and as he knew him by no name except the one so uniquely given—"Scalping-Knife"—there was no way to inquire for him.

Gold Gauntlet decided to improve any chance which might occur, but he knew that he must proceed carefully. Even in this matter the hand of Joseph Lovering might appear, and not for a good deal would the Gladiator anger or turn against him openly.

Until his great work was done he must be on good terms with the man.

On reaching the gulch he found the place as he had left it, and after a few minutes he sat down outside the hut and began to play his violin. This he continued to do for half an hour, and then put it away in the place of concealment he had made for it, and again fell into thought.

His mind was far from easy.

While he lay there something peculiar happened. The gulch had always been quiet enough, but on this occasion he suddenly became conscious of a sound new to him. As he first noticed it, arousing from thought as he did, he thought some one was rapping at the door, and mechanically bade the supposed applicant enter.

A moment later he saw the absurdity of this theory.

No one was at the door, and the sound was not like a knocking of that kind.

What was it? As he aroused fully he grew more interested, for he recognized the fact that the sound was peculiar. He arose, left the hut again and looked all around.

No living thing was in sight, yet, when he stepped to the door, he could still hear the sound.

"Strange!" he muttered, aloud. "It is like the noise of a hand-drill, except that it is singularly muffled and dull. What can it mean? Surely, it does not come from beyond this gulch."

He tried to locate the sound, and was impressed with the idea that it proceeded from the cliff which formed the rear of the hut. This seemed impossible, however; the cliff at that point was without even a crevice, while back of it the land steadily rose.

It was not likely the sound could proceed from the bowels of the earth.

He continued to listen, and the noise did not cease. It still resembled the sound of a drill; it still had a muffled tone; it still seemed to proceed from the cliff.

Gold Gauntlet could not but be very much interested. There was a mystery about the affair which he could not understand, and he was not situated so that he could well despise mysteries. Any unexplained proceeding near his hut was something not to be passed by idly.

An hour passed. By that time the noise had grown more distinct, and he had decided upon two things. The first was that it came from a point back of the visible cliff; the second, that some one was there, and using a drill, or some similar instrument.

A strange and perplexing circumstance! As a rule men do not live in the interior of the earth, or if they do, they never work their way

out. In this case, however, a creature of some sort was at work far underground, and the increasing distinctness of the sounds he made showed that he would soon be in the known world.

"Let him come!" thought the Gladiator. "If a new race of men is to be discovered, let him come; I am the man to see him first. Whatever he is, he will be welcome. I'll try to receive him properly. Come on, man of mystery!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"ADAM."

THE Gladiator sat down and proceeded to wait patiently for the sequel to this singular affair, and while he waited the *clink!-clink!-clink!* in the subterranean region continued with occasional pauses, as though the mysterious workman was resting.

The sound was less dull and muffled than before, and Gold Gauntlet knew that the unknown was not only making some progress, but that that part of the cliff which formed the eastern wall of his hut must be a mere shell. Once he decided to commence work, himself, and meet the toiler, but abandoned the idea.

Near as the unknown seemed, hours passed before he made his appearance. Noon came and passed, and the afternoon wore on slowly. This delay only served to increase Gold Gauntlet's interest; he knew that this was no ordinary affair, and it was not without a sort of fascination.

Clearly, it was no mere mining operation, but some sort of creature—man, monster, or whatever he was—was drilling and hammering his way from the interior of the earth to the outside thereof.

At last there was a long lull, during which no sound was to be heard. Gold Gauntlet sat watching that part of the wall of rock where a sign was to be expected, if anywhere. He was too practical-minded to believe in things supernatural, but when a sign was shown it would be of interest, and he wanted to see it.

Suddenly the noise recommenced.

Clink!-clink!

It was now so close at hand that he involuntarily started. Once, twice, three times the hammer fell. At the third stroke there was something to see as well as to hear.

The point of a drill protruded from the wall into the room.

In a moment it was withdrawn; then followed another blow, and a fragment of the rock, as large as the crown of a hat, fell outward and dropped to the ground. An opening of corresponding size was left in the wall.

Gold Gauntlet secretly held his revolver and watched; a face appeared at the opening.

If he had suspected anything unearthly, the idea would have been abandoned then. The face was that of a man, and of the variety known to the observer, but it was somewhat ghostly, being pale and haggard, with a stubby growth of beard, which did not make it more prepossessing.

The discovery was mutual, and Gold Gauntlet found the unknown's gaze turned full upon him. There was something wild and startled about those eyes, suggesting that the owner was deranged, but the Gladiator remembered how systematically he had been working, and did not adopt the theory.

Instead, he coolly addressed the man.

"Hallo, stranger!" he said, in a matter-of-fact way.

There was no answer, but those wild eyes did not waver in their gaze on his face.

"Walk in!" Gold Gauntlet proceeded.

Still no answer.

"I wasn't expecting company, but you are welcome, I assure you. Don't hesitate; come right in!"

The stranger's lips unclosed.

"In Heaven's name, who are you?" he asked in a weak, trembling voice.

"My name is Jenkins," answered the Gladiator, remembering the alias given him by Isabel Lovering. "Now, as to yourself. Your name is—"

"I have no name," was the reply.

It did not require a very observing man to see that this man was in a very bad state of mind. Despite Gold Gauntlet's cheerful manner, he still looked wild and startled. The Gladiator did not think this anything strange for Dan City or vicinity, so he passed it lightly by, and laughingly answered:

"Such being the case, let me name you. Coming from the center of the earth as you do, we may safely assume that you are the first of your race. Such being the case, you ought to be named Adam. Good! Use your hammer a little more, Adam, enlarge that opening, and come in. I'm a hospitable fellow."

"I'm starving!" uttered Adam.

"Starving? By Jove, that must not be."

Gold Gauntlet sprung to his feet and, seizing a supply of food he had put away, passed it through the opening. It was eagerly taken, and the unknown drew back somewhat and began to eat ravenously. Gold Gauntlet could see him plainly, for a light was burning inside.

The Gladiator saw that the rock was a mere

shell at that point, and that it had been broken further than the opening by the previous work of the stranger. He laid hold of it, pulled strongly, and a section of the cliff large enough for the passage of a man fell outward, plainly revealing the passage beyond.

"Adam" was too much absorbed in eating even to raise his eyes.

Gold Gauntlet saw that the passage led back for some distance, further than he could trace its windings. It was mainly the work of nature, being a vast rent in the cliff, but in places it narrowed greatly. It was at these points that "Adam" had been obliged to mark his way, clipping off the rocky spurs; and the fact that the crevice extended almost to the Gladiator had enabled him to overhear this labor.

His curiosity did not abate, but, having made this opening, he sat down and waited patiently for the unknown to finish eating.

The man ate voraciously, but even hunger like his must be satisfied some time. He finally ceased eating, uttered a sigh, looked at Gold Gauntlet, and then started as though he had actually forgotten his presence.

"Feel better?" the Gladiator cheerfully asked.

"Yes."

"I'm glad of that."

"I hadn't eaten anything for days."

"No? Where do you come from?"

"Adam" started, and looked more sharply at his companion. The pangs of hunger being quieted, he began to use his mind once more. Doubt and suspicion showed in his gaze, and he did not answer the last question. Instead, he propounded one of his own.

"Where am I?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"It can't be you've tunneled many miles from where you started. Where was that?"

"I don't know. Are we near a town?"

"Yes."

"What town?"

"Dan City."

Gold Gauntlet, watching closely, saw that the stranger shivered as he heard this information. He glanced through the door of the hut, where the stretch of sand, with the cliff beyond, was to be seen.

"Do you belong there?" he asked.

"No," the Gladiator replied. "I am only an idle wanderer who has pitched his tent here, so to speak, for a little while. This is my hut; the village is some minutes' walk away. I am not a resident thereof."

This was said to reassure "Adam." He saw that the man had a terror of Dan City; plainly, the way to win his confidence was to let him see that he was not talking with one of the Mormons.

"I want to look out."

The stranger crept through the hole in the cliff into the hut; then, going to the door, stood there several moments in silence, shading his eyes from a light that, after his experience underground, almost blinded him. He was a man of good figure, and muscularly built, but, just then, was superlatively ragged and weakened by hardship.

What he saw seemed to reassure him; he saw only rocks and sand and trees—no human habitation save the hut. When he turned around his face was calmer than before.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked.

"Only a few days."

"Have you been to Dan City?"

"Yes."

"Do you like the people there?"

"I am indifferent to them, one way or another," Gold Gauntlet replied, using his mind and eyes, for he found occasion for both just then. "I am only a rover, as I said; here, today; somewhere else, to-morrow."

"Adam" sat down and ran his hands over his rags with wonder. The explanation the Gladiator was seeking did not come.

"I am a terrible looking object," he said.

"Rags, like beauty, are only skin-deep. You can wash; I'll give you a supply of new clothes; and then you will be as good as new."

"Will you do this?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"You don't know me."

"You are a man, like myself; besides, it's not much to do. What is a suit of clothes, anyway? I'll see you inside of them as soon as possible, but there is at present too much of Mother Earth upon you; in plain words, you need a bath. There's a stream of water ten minutes' walk away. Come with me!"

Gold Gauntlet arose, but Adam put out one hand quickly, the frightened look reappearing in his face.

"No, no!" he said, quickly, nervously.

"Why not?"

"I can't—I dare not stir out of this place until after night falls."

"As you will, but if you are in danger, remember that you now have a friend. You and I have been oddly thrown together, and I want to stand by you until I see you in better condition than this."

The Gladiator looked sharply at the unknown as he spoke. When the man first came forth from the passage he had seen what he believed

to be a familiar something about him, but whether of look or motion he could not tell. This impression grew upon him, but he had not succeeded in settling anything in his mind. Had he met this man some time in the past? If so, where?

These were questions he could not solve.

"Don't play with fire," said Adam, answering the last observation.

"Meaning yourself?"

"Meaning that I may have enemies, and by helping me, you may bring their wrath down upon your head."

"Where are your enemies?—in where you came from a moment ago?"

Gold Gauntlet pointed to the passage.

"There is no one in there."

"Then where did you come from?"

"If you were to follow that passage," replied the man, slowly, "you would come to a sort of natural dungeon. Beyond that you could not go—why, I don't know. I was put there when unconscious; I only know that the place is there, that I was in it, and that I cut and drilled my way out. The dungeon was mainly artificial, and the workmen had left the tools which I found.

"You were kept prisoner there, were you?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Adam" once more started and looked ill at ease.

"Don't feel offended if I do not answer," he said, awkwardly.

"Of course I don't want to intrude upon your secret, but it is sometimes well to have a friend. He who lets his heart grow hard and thinks that he is a power in himself is liable to come to grief any day. No man is too strong to despise friends."

It was strong language to use to this cowering, ragged wretch, who started uneasily at every sound, and Gold Gauntlet knew it, but he was proceeding with an object. The more he looked at "Adam" the more he was impressed by a certain likeness to one he had met in the past, and he had at last been able to place that person.

Whether Adam was he, the Gladiator had not fully settled in his mind, but if it was so, the mystery grew more surprising and obscure.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Adam, replying to the last words, "you mistake my meaning entirely. Situated as I am, the friendship of a dog would be a great blessing to me; what, then, must be that of a man! Don't blame me, sir, for I am a miserable, broken-down, hunted wretch just now. Give me time to think."

"Why not apply for aid to the great man of Dan City—to Joseph Lovering?"

It was a test question, and as such it succeeded well. Adam gave a violent start, and the gathering shadows of twilight did not hide the additional pallor of his face.

"No, no!" he cried; "Not to him. Of all men, not to him!"

The last doubt was gone from the Gladiator's mind.

"Do you know him?" he asked.

"I know him only too well."

"You know him, yet he is not your friend?" pursued Gold Gauntlet, assuming surprise.

"He is my deadly enemy; he it was who made me what I am. Were he to find me my life would not be worth a breath of wind."

And Adam looked around fearfully and shivered once more.

Gold Gauntlet was about to reply, but the sound of footsteps outside caused him to pause. These sounds came nearer, and then the doorway was darkened by the figure of a man. The Gladiator started nervously; this man who stood there gazing at him and Adam was Joseph Lovering!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DANITES.

YANK YELLOWBIRD needed only one sweeping glance across the prairie to see the peril which menaced his party; he knew what meant those three parties of riders who were riding toward the east, and forming by their position an imaginary fan.

The Danites were on the track, and they had taken every possible precaution to prevent the escape of the little party of "Gentiles."

He did not pause a great while where he stood. Prolonged survey was unnecessary: he might be seen by the enemy; and every moment was of value then. He turned away and strode along the ridge, thinking as he went, but had gone only a short distance when he came upon Bronx Hendershot.

"Ah! so it's you, lad," the mountaineer said absently.

"Yes. I could not rest easy—"

"I'm glad you've come, by hurley."

"Your face is grave, Nevermiss—there is danger."

"Thar's al'ays danger, but jest now the atrocious thing is treadin' right on our heels, so ter say. This ain't no time fur many words, but the fact is, them egregious varmints is arter us like 'skeeters, only a sight wu'ss. We've got ter take ter the hills, whether or no. D'y'e see the big pine yonder?"

Yank had spoken rapidly; he now pointed to a tree a hundred rods away.

"Yes," Bronx tersely replied.

"Go ter the party an' lead 'em thar, unless Trail-Lifter finds some sign by the way that says diff'rent. Onderstan'?"

"I do."

"Don't skeer the gals by tellin' too much; them two little women are as pretty as roses, an' I'd hate ter see 'em worry. Fack is, though, the Danites are arter us in an army, an' they're spread out so't a rabbit would find it hard ter git through. Keep this from all on 'em, an' only say that I think our best way is ter run in hyar fur awhile. You might add that I've got a harassin' attack o' newrolgy, which is snappin' my bones like the crack o' a whip. Now be off, an' I'll do the same."

Bronx was willing to leave all to the veteran, and once more he answered briefly. Then they separated.

The younger man led the party to the big pine, taking care not to create any additional alarm. Lovis and Inza were bearing up nobly; Dahlgren thought only of his daughters; Scalping-Knife was tranquil and pleased with trifles, like the song of a bird and the beauty of a wild flower; but all this would be changed by a word of alarm.

Once, when on high ground, Bronx saw Trail-Lifter looking back earnestly; then the Modoc's gaze wandered to his own, the mute nodded shortly and touched his rifle.

Bronx knew that he was not deceived.

They found Yank at the big tree, and the mountaineer's face was as placid as ever.

"I've found just the place fur us," he said, as though everything was progressing as he had wished. "It's an odd refuge, but I reckon it's about what we want."

"If it shall the Danites deceive, we may be happy," Dahlgren replied.

"To be sure. Wal, I hope it will, though ef they hev got a good trailer among 'em, I ain't so sure on't. Foller me, an' I'll show it to ye right away."

A hundred yards they moved forward, going slowly because of the roughness of the way, and then they reached the edge of a peculiar place. At first glance it seemed like an almost level cap of the hills, a place embracing over two hundred acres, and covered with a growth of green-foliaged saplings, so thickly that it amounted almost to a jungle.

Only at second glance did more appear. Through all this place not one large, living tree was to be seen, but at intervals the decapitated, splintered trunk of a huge tree arose above the saplings, grim and lifeless.

"It's clear," explained Yank, "that this 'ere region was heavily timbered a few years ago, an' that some tremenjus wind got at it an' cut the hull wood down as a sickle does grain. Now that place ain't nowhar nigh as level as it seems; thar is gulches an' ravines all through it, but the fallen trees hev bridged over the hollers so they can't be see'd at a distance."

"I think that I catch your idea, Nevermiss," said Broux.

"I consait your head is ekul to it, lad."

"These bridged-over ravines furnish many a hiding-place."

"To be sure, to be sure; an' it is thar we will hide. Come on, once more, an' we'll see what we kin find."

He led the way, and they passed into a place like a tunnel. Once it had been a miniature canyon; it was now more. Upon the huge timbers which lay over the top, rank vines had taken hold, and woven a carpet of their own substance, until the light of day was almost wholly shut out.

Yank had secured a staff, and with this in hand he moved at the head of the party, feeling his way, to make sure that they did not fall into any chasm.

Progress was slow, of course; but haste was no longer necessary; they had fully decided to stop somewhere in this peculiar refuge, and no human eye could trace their movements from a distance.

Their course was not direct. Every few yards other passages crossed the one they were following, now at right angles and then diagonally; and they only cared to keep a course which would take them near the center of the refuge.

At last Yank came to a stop. They had reached a more open place, where the light and sky were not shut out, and the ground was covered with grass which would be very valuable to the horses; but at the same time the character of the surrounding region made discovery almost impossible, it seemed.

Here, as elsewhere, the danger was from a systematic search on their own level.

Yank gave the word, and all dismounted. It was no time for inaction, and the men began to explore the vicinity, to see what accommodations could be found for the party. It would have pleased them to discover a cave, but no such good fortune attended them. The nearest approach to it was where a ledge pushed its top forward of its base, at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

There they decided to camp for a time. The

recess was large enough for their use, and they had a roof over their heads. The only trouble was that it would not be an easy place to defend in case of attack.

Bronx and Bronx realized this, and the latter suggested that a breastwork be thrown up on two sides. There were enough loose stones for this, and it might be of great value in the near future. The idea was good, and all the men went to work.

An hour sufficed to do what they wished.

The mountaineer was by no means easy as to the Danites. Spread out as they were when he last saw them, they might go on and ride far from their desired prey, but he gave them credit for more shrewdness than that.

If they used common sense, and had a good trailer along, danger might be expected at any moment. Such being the case he would not rest idly, and though no extended view could be obtained from any part of the mountain-cap, he decided to ascend as high as he could and look about.

He went at once.

Bronx devoted his attention to Lovis and Inza. They were behaving like heroines, and he felt that danger would be a pleasure if encountered for their sake. This matter was becoming of more interest to him than he had thought possible when he went to Dan City with no object except that duty seemed to require him to aid two helpless girls.

When Yank reached the level of the saplings, he was at once impressed by a change which had taken place in nature. The day had been pleasant, though sultry, and the sky unclouded. Now, however, clouds of the blackest hue were rolling up against the heavens, and though the sun was not yet obscured, it bade fair to be utterly shut out within the hour.

"We're goin' ter hev a shower," muttered the veteran, "an' it wouldn't surprise me ef it was a most egregious lively one. Wal, let it come; it will make our trail all the more hard to foller—I hope the atrocious Danites ain't in the hills yet."

Standing in the cover of the bushes he endeavored to look back, but soon realized the futility of the effort. The immediate vicinity was like an ocean of green, while the remoter part of the hills was hidden by the higher ground.

"Might as wal try ter look through the 'arth, by hurley!" he observed. "The only way is ter go back along our trail, an' I ain't sure I kin do that. It's too dark under the fallen timber ter see a track, an' in that cobweb the wisest man would git lost, I consait. What's ter be done?"

The matter was more serious than might seem to be the case at first thought. If the pursuers were in any degree shrewd, they were liable to enter the fallen timber area at any time, and there was no way to see them until they were at hand. If once they did enter the place, it all became a matter of chance; it was a remarkably good place to hide, but luck might bring the Danites upon them.

"I must know what's goin' on," added Yank, more emphatically. "It would be foolish ter trust all ter luck."

As he turned away the almost stifling air conveyed the heavy boom of thunder.

"It's got ter come," the mountaineer thought, with another glance at the black cloud. "I'm a bit afeer'd it will be wet in the gulches, but we kin git along with that ef we kin with the Danites, I consait."

He descended and, passing near where Bronx and the girls were talking lightly, moved along toward the west. Again boomed the thunder as he went. He had gone fifty yards or more when, reaching one of the few open spaces, his attentive gaze noticed the wavering of the tall grass ahead. In that place, protected as it was from the wind, this meant something; it meant the presence of some living creature; and Yank came to a sudden halt.

A moment more and a brown hand was partially raised above the grass.

It moved with a peculiar motion; the mountaineer stepped back to the cover of a boulder and dropped behind it.

He had received a signal, and mute as it was he knew who had made it, and what it meant. The man in the grass was Trail-Lifter; the signal meant—"Danger!"

Yank lay like a statue, but his rifle was ready for use if it was needed. He did not know what the danger was, but he had faith in the Modoc. Suddenly, however, everything was explained.

A man walked out into the light, and then the rattle of a stone behind him was followed by a curse. A second person appeared, limping perceptibly.

The mountaineer recognized both these men; he had seen them at Dan City. The danger was nearer than he had thought.

"May the devil fly away with this place!" growled the second man, stopping to caress his foot.

"Do you want a chance to bruise your toes when you get to the next world?" asked his companion, with covert sarcasm.

"I certainly don't want to go stumbling through this villainous place. It ain't likely

they have hid here, and even if they have, how the blazes are we to find them in such a hole?"

"That ain't for us to say. Hurlforth leads."

"Hang Hurlforth!"

"Say it to his face."

"Not I; that fellow would as soon kill friend as foe, if his will was crossed. I say, Pete, I believe here's a footprint. Can it be we're on the track, after all? Egad! I'd like to be the one to nab 'em, and we'll seller it up!"

CHAPTER XXV.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

The Danite forgot his injured foot and spoke with some enthusiasm, while Yank Yellowbird frowned and advanced his rifle a little. He did not know whether his party had passed over that particular spot, but if they had it would not be hard to find the horses' tracks, now that suspicion was aroused.

The reply of the second Danite relieved his mind greatly.

"Nonsense!" returned the man; "there is no track there."

"Then what is it?"

"A piece of wood lay there when I came, and I kicked it aside. You haven't found the runaways yet."

"I wish I had."

"No doubt."

"I am tired of this dog's life; tired of being Hurlforth's dog, to come and go at his say-so."

"There ain't any law to prevent you leaving Dan City, if your heart has turned tender."

"Don't take me for a flat!" retorted the Dazite, as though his honor was assailed. "I am no weak chicken, and don't you think I am. I'm ambitious; I want to be a shining light, like Hurlforth and Lovering. There's only one way to get ahead at Dan City, partner, and that is—to be merciless. Cut, slay; that's what makes a man at Dan City."

"Then why in blazes don't you cut and slay?"

"I'm going to. Once let me sight these runaways, and I'll show you. One man in particular I want a hack at."

"Who is that?"

"Yank Yellowbird. I want to get a whack at that man; I do, by Judas!"

The mountaineer smiled grimly.

"It would be a favor to the whole West, if I should knock him over," added the Danite.

"Nobody but the goody-goody crowd has any show when he's around. He takes up for them, and against men of enterprise. Go where you will this side the Mississippi and hear of a big scheme that's failed, and ask who killed it out, and they'll tell you it was Yank Yellowbird."

Just then an unusually heavy peal of thunder seemed to shake the ground.

"Come on, Toke!" exclaimed the second Danite. "There's going to be a mighty lively shower, and we have work to do before it begins. Hang this place! I don't believe Yellowbird's party is here."

They went on, and as they disappeared in the darker shadows, Yank awoke. No need to go on a scout then; he knew only too well where the pursuers were. It seemed, however, that they were proceeding entirely by chance.

Trail-Lifter glided to the veteran's side and his nimble fingers flashed off a message. There was an exchange of opinion, and then they returned to their friends. The horses had finished grazing, and they were collected in a niche where they were less likely to be discovered. As an incautious word might ruin all, Yank frankly explained the situation.

"This is a time when caution is an egregious sight better than courage," he added, "an' the surer we hide an' say nothin', the better we shall come out."

"They will never find us in this place that is so dark," replied Dahlgren, confidently.

"It's hard ter say. Ef the 'ull gang is in this region, an' gropin' 'round among the gulches, they may stumble on us by mistake, so ter say. Luckily, they may come within a few yards on us an' be none the wiser."

Just then bonds and bars of light shot down through the crevices of the trees, like fiery swords piercing the darkness, and the rocks seemed to tremble in terror as a tremendous peal of thunder followed. Scalping-Knife spoke, for the first time in hours.

"The way is dark!" he muttered, with manifest uneasiness, and then he crept closer to Bronx.

"We are to have a storm that is hard," added the Swede.

"Pears like it, by hurley."

Yank answered absently, and walked beyond the sloping roof of rock. There was a patter of rain on the leaves above. The lightning flashed again, and he saw Bronx by his side.

"What troubles you, Nevermiss?" asked the young man.

"Did I show that I was upset?"

"Not particularly; I doubt if any one but me noticed it, but I am more accustomed to your ways."

"Thar is a trifle o' onsartainty in my mind, more than what 'rises from the atrocious human insex. We are goin' ter hev a harrycane."

"It is probable."

"Water will fall by the bar!"

"Very likely."

"Has it 'urred ter you that it may be egregious deep in these gulches 'fore long?"

Bronx started slightly.

"By heavens! there is something in that."

"I consait thar is. The top o' this pecooliar region is lower than the ridge beyend, while the bottom o' the gulches is a good bit lower still. Ef it rains as we expect, thar will be a river in each o' these gulches; an' the bigger the rain, the bigger the river."

"In plain words, we may all be drowned out."

"We may git most egregious wet, I admit."

"It would be very risky to try and leave when the gulches are full of Danites."

"To be sure. I don't think I could make my left foot go sprawlin' around in sech a crisis; the weak sister had ruther hide than run, any time. I was in a flood once, lad, an' though I didn't enjoy it overmuch thar was a melancholy pleasure in thinkin' that I was followin' in the steps o' my great-uncle, Noah Yellowbird. It's a credit ter our pedigree that we al'ays go through a flood in good shape."

Yank suddenly ceased speaking, and laid his hand upon Bronx's shoulder.

"Hark! What was that?" he asked.

"I confess that I only heard the patter of the rain, and the distant rumble of thunder."

"Stay hyar a bit, lad; I want ter investigate."

Without waiting for an answer the mountaineer stooped and glided away. A flash of lightning showed his bent figure to Bronx for a moment; then the transient light faded and nothing was to be seen or heard except the voice of the elements. The storm had not yet fully broken upon them, but the rain was patterning on the leaves above and the thunder boomed heavily.

Bronx was ill at ease; he remembered Yank's prophecy, and was troubled as he thought what the rain might do if it flooded the gulches.

In the mean while Yank had gone a few yards and come to a stop. He had found abundant proof of his suspicion.

There were other men close at hand; he heard their voices plainly now, as he had heard them dimly at first; and as the lightning flashed again, he saw them shaking the water from their garments.

"It's goin' ter be a tearin' old blow," said one.

"An' it's liable ter rain a trifle," added another.

"Lucky we're in a safe place."

"All you think of is your precious skins!" exclaimed a harsh voice. "Wetting will do you no harm, and I'd keep you at work if I had any idea where they were."

Yank nodded gravely; he knew that voice well.

"I've done my duty, ain't I, Hurlforth?"

"Of course you have done it; I don't allow any less."

Plainly, the marshal did not believe in being prodigal with words of praise.

A peal of thunder, heavier than any that had gone before, made the mountain tremble.

"It's going to be a furious storm," said one of the Danites.

"It'll soon be over," Hurlforth replied. "Camp down here, anywhere, and take it easy until we are ready to start. We won't give those fools a minute of grace, but there is one consolation, they'll have to bide as well as us. It's going to be a perfect blizzard, if I am any judge. When it lets up, we'll take after them without losing a minute."

There was a flash—a boom—a louder rattling above; and then the rain came pouring down in torrents. It beat upon the leaves and logs above, but many huge drops came shooting through this inadequate cover, and as they beat upon the mountaineer, he knew that the rain would soon have everything its own way.

"This is blamed poor cover," growled a Danite.

"Perhaps there is better near," suggested Hurlforth; "you can look if you wish."

Some of the men turned away, but Yank was ahead of them. There was danger in the last suggestion. The refugio of his little party was only a few yards distant, and zealous search on the part of the Danites bade fair to reveal the leaning cliff to them.

Bronx had returned to the other refugees, and Yank rejoined them without excitement. The storm was now raging with fury. Rain descended in torrents; the roll of the thunder was startlingly loud, peal following peal in rapid succession; the fiery swords shot down as though pursuing each other; and the moaning of the wind, added to the thunder, made conversation possible only by raising the voice.

"I hate ter disturb ye in sech a crisis," observed the mountaineer, "but I a'prove o' movin' on. It ain't the best o' weather fur a promenade, I consait, but thar is wu'ss than rain."

"You have seen the enemy!" exclaimed Lovis.

"I think they may be nigh."

"They are near."

"Hev you seen 'em?"

"No, but your new order proves it. Speak plainly, Nevermiss; we are not children."

"You're rosebud gals, an' oncommon pretty an' heroic at that. Ye remind me o' my aunt, Joan Ark Yellowbird, by hurley! Wal, there is a trifling bit o' danger—jest an artom. Bronx, may I trouble you an' Still Tongue ter bring the hosses?"

"Consider it done, mountaineer."

Bronx answered briefly, and with the Modoc by his side, glided away.

Yank looked keenly toward the quarter from which danger was to be expected. If the Danites searched for a refuge it would be a wonder if they did not find the leaning cliff. Dahlgren began to speak, but the veteran stopped him.

A human figure had appeared in the recess, and the mountaineer knew it was none of their party!

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE FLOOD.

YANK YELLOWBIRD moved forward a few paces and crouched down only a few feet from the unknown. Once more the lightning flashed, and as the fiery swords cut the darkness he had a glimpse of the man's face. He was a total stranger.

The latter had been using his eyes, too, and though he did not detect his human neighbors, he did see that there was a refuge. He turned his head.

"This way, men!"

He was not allowed to finish the sentence. Yank sprung upon him like a panther, and in a moment more the man was lying upon the ground with the mountaineer's iron grasp upon him.

Taken entirely by surprise, he had no chance to make an outcry until he was prostrated, and after that his last chance was gone. Yank Yellowbird was not the man to make a slip.

Dahlgren came to his side, but as the prisoner must be bound, Nevermiss would have been somewhat at fault had not Trail-Lifter also appeared. The Modoc needed no advice or explanation; from some pocket, or elsewhere, he produced cords, and, without a word or motion between him and Yank, began to bind the Danite.

It was soon done; a gag was added; and then the mountaineer arose. He saw that the horses were at hand, and all ready for a start. He directed his companions to mount at once.

In this crisis only Yank, Bronx and the Modoc fully retained their calmness, nor was it strange that the others were ill at ease. They were in utter darkness except when the lightning flashed, and the peculiar way in which the electric fluid penetrated to the gulches—coming down through the roof of logs and vines in fiery swords, as it did—was not reassuring.

Add to this that the storm was raging above with a wild discord of rain, wind and thunder, and that the deadly Danites were near, and it was not strange that those who had seen their merciless way were greatly disturbed.

Nevertheless, Lovis and Inza were calm, and they obeyed Yank's directions in a way that pleased him.

He started the party as soon as possible, and they moved away in a direction opposite to the men last seen. The mountaineer led the way, while Trail-Lifter, feeling that something of interest might be seen, lingered behind for a few moments.

He had not miscalculated. The last of the fugitives had barely gone when voices again sounded under the leaning cliff. The Modoc strained his keen eyes, and as the lightning flashed, he saw men entering the sheltered space.

The fugitives had gone none too soon.

"Here we are, in some sort of cover," said Hurlforth's heavy voice. "I don't know that I am sorry, either; the storm is going to be a terror. Hustle around, men, and see if you can find something to build a fire. There ought to be dry wood scattered about, and a small blaze will make matters more cheerful."

Trail-Lifter nodded sharply; then turned and glided away. He knew the search for fuel would soon reveal the bound Danite, and cause a great commotion. Besides, if he let his party get far away he was not liable to overtake them; it would be easy to get lost in that jumble of gulches.

That ride was one the fugitives were not likely to soon forget. Once clear of the sheltering cliff they saw more plainly how violently the storm was raging. The din above was startling and rain poured down into the gulches in streams. The fallen trees above making a roof in places only to act as a spout at other points.

Yank Yellowbird and the Modoc were the only members of the party who bore this philosophically. Bronx, riding by the side of Lovis, was worried and troubled that the girls should be thus exposed.

The mountaineer went on scot, and in one hand carried the staff with which he had before felt the way. At any moment they might come upon a chasm, and rash progress would be liable to result in fatality.

Despite all his precautions he occasionally collided with a log or rock, but nothing could dampen his confidence and good-humor.

"This 'ere is the most egregious place I ever was in, by hurley!" he observed, as he paused for a moment. "It's wuss than a tomb, fur the roof is poorer, an' them Danites is an atrocious sight more dangerous than the folks you usually find in a tomb. I'll bet my hat I'll git the newrolgy the wu'st way out o' this, but I'll uphold the honor o' the Yellowbird pedigree of the newrolgy suaps my j'ints cl'ar out o' their socks—*I will, by hurley!*"

Having freed his mind he went on again in the old way, but he saw with some uneasiness that the gulches were fast becoming river-beds. At times the water was ankle-deep, and the supply was increasing every minute.

This was decidedly ominous, and with the prospect of a deluge ahead of them he decided that they ought to get clear of this peculiar place.

To do this was another matter, for not only did the passages cross and re-cross each other at all possible angles, but no human being could keep an accurate knowledge of the points of compass.

There was great danger of wandering in an irregular circle, and actually going back to the Danites.

Still he pushed on bravely, and the storm raged furiously above. Now and then, when they reached an open space, the vivid lightning showed that the saplings above were bent almost to the level by the wind, and its roaring, added to the almost deafening thunder, made the night wild, indeed.

The force of the storm was lost to the fugitives, but one dangerous fact stared them constantly in the face; the water in the gulches steadily deepened, and often touched Yank's knees.

The prospect of a deluge increased.

Bronx devoted much of his time to Lovis, but did not fail to observe Yank, and as they went on he became aware that the mountaineer was troubled. He halted often, and though he talked as cheerfully as ever, it was plain that his mind was not at ease.

Finally he stopped in an open space.

"Stay back under kiver, the rest on ye," he directed. "I'm goin' up the rocks hyar an' get a look around."

"I trust that of new danger there is none," returned Dahlgren, uneasily.

"Danger! Land o' Goshen, no! Not much, thar ain't; but I want ter see ef we're erbout out o' this egregious place. That's all!"

Nobody objected, and after a hard struggle he reached the top of the rocky wall. Here the wind was sweeping along with tremendous force, and he was obliged to cling to a rock to keep his position. It was a scene of awful grandeur. Night had fallen, and it would have been dark 'above, as well as below, had not the lightning flashed almost incessantly. This touched rock, and tree, and earth and air with its own peculiar light, and seemed to dance exultantly around him.

He had improved its glare to take one good look when his attention was diverted. He looked and saw Hendershot beside him.

"What is the prospect, Nevermiss?" Bronx asked, raising his voice to a shout.

The mountaineer pointed.

"Look thar!"

"What is it?"

"Be we any nigher out o' this egregious place than we was when we started?"

"We don't seem to have progressed much!"

"To be sure, we ain't. Now hyar I've led ye a trampin', an' it wouldn't s'prise me ef we was within fifty yards o' Hurlforth's an' his atrocious fiasex this minute. Fack is, I can't keep a direck course whar them gulches twists about so like hurley, an' no landmark ter go by."

"That is not strange."

"It's egregious onlucky."

"Why not find a new refuge and come to a stop?"

"Bronx, hev you noticed how deep the water is under foot in the gulches?"

"Yes."

"An' that it's risin' all the time?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I'm mortally afeerd we're goin' ter hev a bad time; I be, by hurley. I wish we'd never come into this egregious hole!"

"There was no sign of a storm then."

"True, it came up sudden. I wouldn't keer ef we could git out, but the minute we git down in them gulches no human can tell east from north, or south from east. How be we goin' ter git out?"

"I am still in favor of seeking a new refuge, and stopping. This aimless wandering is not only severe work for the girls, but we may at any moment run upon the Danites."

"That's jest what troubles me."

"If we do that the girls will be recaptured, and that, too, without hope of rescue; the men of our party would probably be killed in their defense."

"Solid fack, ev'ry word. Go on with yer argyment."

"I don't want to influence you against your judgment, for I realize the fact that you know more about this work than I do, but it seems to me that we should make a choice of evils, take

the least, and get to the highest ground we can find and settle down for the night."

"Thank ye, lad; your opinion jibes with mine, an' it shall be did. It's a wild night, Bronx!"

It was all of that. They had to shout to make themselves heard; the wind swept furiously across the hills; the thunder crashed and rolled; and the lightning played luridly all around.

They descended to where their friends awaited them, and were troubled to find a small river running through the gulch. The horses had grown restless, while even Lovis and Inza had come to see the danger of this rapid increase of water.

Yank spoke cheerfully, and started on again. It was now his desire to find a place sufficiently elevated to keep them safe from the flood, and it must be done without delay. The full force of the rainfall was now making itself felt, and he could almost *feel* it increase in depth around him momentarily. Once he plunged into an unusually deep pool, and was wet to his breast, while the swift current almost carried him off his feet.

He knew then that if they did not reach a safe place inside of ten minutes they would have to abandon the horses to their fate and, one and all, climb the rocks as he and Bronx had lately done for purpose of observation.

"I never got inter a fix o' this kind afore," he muttered, as he waded on, "an' ef harm comes ter them poaty gals I'll go off som'ers an' shave my head like the philosopher did, an' never try ter face my feller-men ag'in. Hello! what's this? Higher ground, I do b'lieve, by hurley!"

It was not so much high ground as rock; he had reached a ledge, and each step he took made their chances seem brighter. No gleam of lightning came to help him, and he could see nothing, but as the horses struggled up the ascent the last of them was soon beyond the water.

"Stay hyar!" directed Yank, halting his party. "I want ter investigate an' see what we hev."

He went on, and continued to ascend for several yards; then he met solid rock which came down at an angle and connected with the ledge. At their junction was a recess, while the overhanging rock furnished a roof. In fact, the place was very much like their first refuge, except that it was much higher, and the foundation was of rock.

There, he believed, they would be safe from the flood—at any rate, he dared not leave such a shelter.

He went back, and, though he found that the flood-water was still rising rapidly, led the way to the recess in good spirits.

"Jump off yer bosses," he directed, "an' dance a war jig, or flop down on the ledge, as you see fit. Sorry we ain't got a wardrobe in this hotel, but visitors was not expected, ye see. Wet clothes is better than bein' drowned, though. This is a most egregious big shower, by hurley! Noah Yellowbird, one o' my ancestors, left a journal o' his adventur's in a flood—an' mighty wal writ it was too!—an' I reckon I'll hev ter do the same. Don't want the Yellowbird pedigree ter suffer fur want o' all the facks. I mean ter do my duty, an' the only drawbacks is the weak sister an' the atrocious newrolgy, which has upset my p'ints a good 'eal. I knowed a man once who had newrolgy so bad that it peeled his skulp off his head like an old stockin', an'—"

The mountaineer suddenly ceased speaking.

His party had dismounted, and he was standing beside them, talking in his most genial way, but the Modoc had glided to his side, taken his arm, and shown a desire to have him step to one side.

Yank never refused to notice his sagacious follower, and he allowed himself to be led to a point of rock which formed one side of the recess. They passed the projection, the young Indian pointed, and then the mountaineer stood silent with surprise and dismay.

Twenty-five yards away burned a small fire, and around were seated Hurlforth and his Danites. The two parties were imprisoned by the flood on the same ledge with no barrier between them, and not one hundred feet apart!

CHAPTER XXVII.

DANGER!

THE coming of Joseph Lovering startled Gold Gauntlet. Personally he had no fear of Dan City's great man, and he would under other circumstances have been rather pleased to see him at the hut, but the presence of the man who had tunneled out of the cliff—and whom he had fancifully named Adam—put a very different aspect to the affair.

Adam had just announced that he had great reason to fear Lovering; had shown that he felt the utmost terror in connection with him; and if the suspicion which was in Gold Gauntlet's mind was well founded, there was, perhaps, abundant reason for this fear and alarm.

Hence, the Gladiator's dismay when he saw that the new-comer was Lovering.

Several thoughts flashed through his mind, chief among which was the recollection that the shades of evening made the survey of features

almost out of the question. Perhaps Lovering would not recognize Adam.

At the risk of injuring his own schemes the Gladiator at once moved with an eye to Adam's safety, and his first step was to rise, call Lovering distinctly by name, shake his hand and welcome him to the hut.

Adam was thus plainly warned.

Then Gold Gauntlet, with an appearance of carelessness, set the rude table which he had made back against the hole in the cliff, so as to hide it. While doing this he had been trying to think of some satisfactory way to introduce Adam, but in the way of an ordinary presentation was the fact that, in his present agitated mood, Adam would not be able to talk without betraying himself.

Gold Gauntlet could think of but one way to dispose of him.

"This is a foolish fellow I have picked up, and made my servant," he said, with a wave of his hand. "If you wish, I'll send him outside."

"Oh! no; don't do it," Joseph answered. "I've only dropped in for a chat; let your man remain."

"Just as you say. Is Miss Isabel well?"

"Quite, thank you."

"I need scarcely ask if you are."

"I am well in body."

"But not in mind?"

"I did not say that."

"Pardon me; I had no right to infer it."

"You were right, nevertheless. I am troubled, Mr. Jenkins, and I don't mind saying why. Two girls, who had pledged themselves to become my wives, but to whom I had not been married—in fact, elder Hicks wanted one of them—have disappeared. They were either abducted, or lured away by evil-minded parties."

"That is unfortunate," replied Gold Gauntlet, with a show of real sympathy.

"Confoundedly so!" exclaimed Joseph.

"Can't you recover them?"

"I have already sent Hurlforth."

"Probably he will find them."

"I hope so."

Joseph hesitated. He felt that he ought not to tell the Gladiator too much, but the impulse to be confidential was too strong to be resisted.

"It is not so much the loss of the girls that I deplore," he added, "but it may lead to something unpleasant. A great many people are opposed to us Mormons, and if they can get a point against us it is surprising how their tongues will wag. Now I will say this about Dan City—there has never been a single thing done here which the most exacting could censure; it is a town even more upright and honorable than the straight-laced villages of puritanical New England."

"I haven't a doubt of it," replied Gold Gauntlet, sympathetically.

"All this," continued Joseph, "is due to a lank meddler named, or called, Yank Yellowbird. Who he is I don't know, except that he has been hanging around for some time, and that he is opposed to the true faith."

"Then it was he who abducted the girls!"

"I think so; he and a certain Bronx Hender- shot, who is of the same pattern."

Gold Gauntlet was pleased to see Joseph's mind run in such a channel. While such was the case he would pay no attention to Adam. The Gladiator frequently glanced at the man of mystery, and though it had grown so dark that only his figure could be seen, it was clear that he was in a state of great terror.

He had cowered back in one corner, and there he sat in silence, his gaze persistently directed toward Joseph, but never stirring even a hand. Gold Gauntlet could imagine how he listened and trembled—if the mere mention of Joseph's name had frightened him so much, what must his presence do?

Joseph continued in a complaining tone for some minutes, reiterating his statement that Dan City was a model, but much-abused place, and Gold Gauntlet encouraged him to talk in this vein.

All the while the Gladiator was wondering how he could end the interview. He would have invited Joseph out for a walk, but he knew that Adam would seize the first chance to escape, and he wanted to talk with him further.

Lovering, however, finally concluded that he had said enough on this subject, and that it was dull business sitting there in the dark.

"Jenkins," he said, abruptly changing the subject, "why can't we have Hicks and another man here, and have a game of cards?"

"A good idea," replied Gold Gauntlet.

"Suppose you send your servant for them."

He was looking full at Adam now, and the man moved uneasily, but the darkness was in his favor. Joseph could not have told whether he was white or black.

"He hasn't the intelligence for it," answered the Gladiator, something alarmed by the turn of affairs. "You will remember that I said he was feeble-minded."

"He can carry a note, can't he?"

"I suppose so."

"I'll write one then, and let him take it to Hicks."

This was even more disturbing. To write a

note a light must be had, and that would give Joseph a chance to see the supposed servant. This would never do. Gold Gauntlet now felt sure of Adam's identity, and he knew that it would be a miracle if Joseph did not recognize him at first sight.

The Gladiator's position was by no means pleasant; he wanted to keep in Joseph's good graces, while, as for betraying Adam, he could not, and would not, think of it.

He found himself placed between two fires, as it were, and was trying to see his way out of the dilemma when there was another and welcome interruption.

A voice outside the hut called his name—a voice he quickly recognized—and he hastened to the door. A lady sat there on a restively-moving horse.

"Good-evening, Miss Isabel!" Gold Gauntlet said.

"Good-evening, Mr. Jenkins. Is Joseph here?"

"Yes, Isabel," said her brother, answering for himself.

"Mr. Hicks is at the house, and wishes to see you. I thought you were here, so I rode this way."

"Good! I'll go to Hicks at once. You'll excuse me, won't you, Jenkins?"

"I can suggest a better way," interrupted Isabel. "Have Jerry accompany you. While you talk with Mr. Hicks I'll talk with Jerry—he is such good company. I am never so happy as when in his company!"

Gold Gauntlet smiled grimly. Despite the mocking tone in which she spoke he was pleased. He had found her an opponent worthy of attention, and her sarcasm was uttered in such a bright way that it was always deprived of its sting in a great measure.

He did not blind himself to the fact that they were enemies, but she was a most interesting enemy—and it was a pity that, in order to be avenged on Joseph, he must break her heart.

"I will fly to your arms, Miss Lovering," he declared, answering her last words.

"Nonsense! Do you think that I never heard of the man who wormed the viper, and how he was stung as his reward?" she retorted.

"Lips like yours would tempt any viper to sting, fair Isabel. They also tempt honest men, like me."

"If you are a sample of honest men, heaven save me—my amiability will not allow me to finish. Good-night, until I see you at the house!"

She wheeled her horse and galloped away.

"Great Scott! the girl grows crazier every day!" lamented Joseph. "It's astonishing how she differs from me. Well, Jenkins, are you ready to go?"

"Thank you, but I must have half an hour to prepare for the event. You know that I go to be Isabel's guest. I'll follow very soon."

Lovering did not object, and as he walked away, the Gladiator returned to the hut.

"Adam!" he called.

There was no answer, nor could he see the form of that person anywhere in the hut. Knowing that he had not passed out of the door, the Gladiator could see but one way to account for his absence.

He went to the opening in the cliff; the table which had ~~been~~ ^{been} it had been disarranged.

Gold Gauntlet promptly lighted his lamp, entered the opening himself, pulled the table back so as to hide it, and then went on with the lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other. Who he might encounter in this strange place he did not know, so he went prepared for instant work.

If he had been at all at a loss to know how Adam could make his way through solid rock, the wonder vanished as he went on. It was not all solid rock. A fissure extended through the place, now widening ten or twelve feet, then narrowing so much that he could barely pass.

It was at these points that Adam had been obliged to use his drill, chipping off the sharp projections of rock.

Gold Gauntlet went forward in an expectant frame of mind, but what was ahead of him he did not know. Adam had come "out of the bowels of the earth," as the Gladiator at first expressed it, but he must have had a starting-point.

The secret of the place seemed almost in Gold Gauntlet's grasp, but it might be one better left alone. Something strange and ominous lay beyond—perhaps danger and death. Whatever it was, he went on coolly to meet it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NAME IS SPOKEN.

The passage led Gold Gauntlet further than he had expected, but it finally narrowed to a point with only a small opening beyond, which was more like the entrance to the den of a wild animal than anything else, except that it was surrounded by stone.

He looked through and could see nothing; he advanced his lamp and beheld a small room, with Adam cowering in one corner of it.

"So it is you," he said.

"I'll never be taken alive!" declared Adam, hoarsely.

"Nonsense! Nobody wants to take you. Joe Lovering has gone home, while as for me, didn't I save you from him?"

Adam slowly rose to his feet.

"Oh! it's you," he said, in an easier voice; "I didn't know you."

"Yes, it's I, and we are once more by ourselves; but what manner of place is this?"

"It was my dungeon."

"It looks like one. So you were really imprisoned here?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

Adam hesitated.

"Don't ask me," he finally replied. "I don't know, and though you have done me a favor, I don't care to hazard a guess. Enough to say that I was imprisoned here, and have been kept like a dog, for weeks. My allowance of food barely sufficient to keep life in my body, and I nearly starved. This supply was lowered at intervals through the top of this dungeon. You will see that it is very high; I never saw those who lowered it to me. Who put me here I don't know, for I was unconscious when it was done, but I lived for days—weeks—months, I think—in this awful way. Finally I found the drill and hammer with which I worked my way out; things left by accident, no doubt, by the men who put the finishing touches to this nearly-natural cave."

"And is there no passage beyond here?"

"Not unless it is up there."

Adam pointed toward the roof of the dungeon.

"Take this lamp," Gold Gauntlet directed, "hold it as high as you can, and see if you can discover any passage."

Adam obeyed, but it was a useless experiment; the dungeon was so high that the light was ineffectual.

"Did you ever hear of Dan City Reservation?" the Gladiator continued.

"No."

"It is a place set apart by the rulers of the town, and little, or nothing, is known about it, but I can't help thinking that if we could pass on beyond this dungeon we should be in the heart of the Reservation, and among strange people."

"For heaven's sake, don't try it. Has Lovering really gone?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you think me a weak coward, to run away as I did."

"No; that was natural."

"It was natural for a man in my condition. I am not naturally a coward, but I have lived here in solitude until my reason nearly vanished; I am weak from want of food; and I stood in terror of that man. Have patience, friend; I am growing stronger, and by and by I shall be able to thank you as you deserve, and myself show a bold front to the world."

Adam, leaning against the rock, stood almost beside Gold Gauntlet. The light fell full upon his pale face. It was a manly, intelligent face, and his voice and manner gathered force and firmness every moment.

"I am curious to know your story."

"Don't ask it—at least, not at present. I am placing confidence in you, even though you are Lovering's friend, but I do not forget the pains you took to shield me when he called at the hut."

"I can't help wondering why you and he are enemies."

"No crime of mine led to it."

"Then it was a crime of his?"

"I did not say so. Pardon me if it seems ungrateful in me to withhold confidence, but I am peculiarly situated; I must have time to think. My mind is weakened by the long-continued horrors of this dungeon."

"I see."

Gold Gauntlet answered absently. There was silence for several minutes, during which the gladiator was trying to decide on one certain point. He did this finally, and spoke again.

"Do you think that I don't know your name?"

"Adam" started slightly.

"My name!" he repeated.

"Your name, Morgan Severn!"

The man started again, and as he looked at Gold Gauntlet, the startled expression crept into his eyes once more.

"In heaven's name who are you?" he demanded.

"One not so ignorant as you think; you are Morgan Severn, and you have a brother named Ralph."

"Have you seen— But, no, no; he cannot be in this accursed region; at least, I hope not."

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, he is not here; at least, I have not seen him."

"Then how did you get your information? How do you know that I am Morgan Severn?"

"Now we are even," replied the Gladiator, with a smile. "Each of us has his secret. I certainly don't intend to tell how I know that you are Morgan Severn, unless you make a clean breast of your object in coming to Utah."

Severn took the lamp and, holding it forward, studied Gold Gauntlet's face closely. The scrutiny was composedly borne, and when Severn shook his head, his companion smiled. He had not feared recognition.

"Useless!" muttered Severn.

"Exactly."

"I am beset with mystery."

"So am I. Well, we will both keep our secrets, but I think we can be friends just the same."

"Heaven grant it! There is no one else here that I can call friend, and I shall be glad to feel that you are that. I do not understand how you can also be on such good terms with Lovering, but you took some trouble to protect my secret at the hut, and I trust you."

"You can do so on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you swear never to betray me to any one, by word or act, while I am faithful to you."

"I swear!" was the quick reply.

"Good! And now come to the hut again, and you shall wash and shave, and have decent clothes."

"I dare not do it. My present condition is a good disguise, but if I were to follow your advice, I should court recognition. I am not here to remain inactive, but until I recover my strength it is imperatively necessary that I keep out of sight."

"Everything shall be as you say, and with common sense to aid us I feel sure we shall not clash. If you are puzzled as to me, I am filled with wonder at the idea of you and Joseph Lovering being foes—"

"You don't know what a scoundrel that womanish-faced, smooth-spoken wretch is!" cried Severn, his hands involuntarily clinching.

A sudden fire leaped into Gold Gauntlet's eyes, his face grew hard and stern, and an impetuous reply seemed trembling on his lips. With an effort he repressed it, and calmly replied:

"You can hate him all you choose, but I must exact one more promise. Do him not bodily harm without consulting me, and letting me talk with you."

"I promise," answered Severn, after a pause.

"You mentioned your brother, Ralph. He is not in the West, is he?"

"I think not; at least, I hope not; but I have so long been like one dead that I have at times feared he would follow me here, to see what had become of me, and fall into the same deadly hands that seized me. I hope Ralph is in the East."

The speaker did not know of the hotel tragedy, nor what the blood-stained bed had revealed to Yank Yellowbird and Bronx Hendershot.

"I have no means of knowing as to that. By the way, do you think your escape from this dungeon will be discovered?"

"It is hardly probable. When food was lowered to me it was in a basket worked by two strings, and the contents tipped out, not removed by me. Besides, I never had a light until I found that one with the tools which enabled me to dig out. I don't believe that my unknown captors are aware whether I am living or dead."

"Good!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I propose to investigate here. I must have some means of getting to the top of your dungeon, and if the opening through which they lower the food is large enough to admit of the passage of a man, I am going on and discover just what is beyond."

"I wish you would wait until I am stronger."

"I will; reasons of my own make this desirable. This leads to another matter. As you say, you need to recuperate physically before you undertake any great work. What are your plans?"

"I must hide somewhere."

"There is a good hotel at Dan City."

Severn started.

"I dare not go there; it would cost me my life. To my enemies I am now the same as dead, but once let me be seen at liberty and I should soon be dead in reality; they would show me no more mercy than if I were a wild beast."

"I will undertake to see you safe through. I know of a small cave which will furnish a hiding-place, and I will supply you with food."

Severn put out his hand and grasped that of his companion warmly. He murmured a few broken words of thanks, and then Gold Gauntlet suggested that they return to the hut. They went, and the Gladiator made up a package of food. This done he escorted his new acquaintance to the cave he had mentioned.

He made him as comfortable there as possible, and then returned to the hut in a very thoughtful mood. The discoveries of the evening were of vast importance to him, though he could see no way in which the presence of Morgan Severn could be a benefit. There was a mystery about the man, and though he had helped him for humanity's sake, dangerous complications might arise therefrom.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORE ABOUT THE SILVER ANCHOR.

GOLD GAUNTLET barely stopped for a minute at his hut, and then went to Lovering's, according to agreement. The evening was not eventful, and Gold Gauntlet returned home at

an early hour on account of a threatening shower. The sky was black, and thunder and lightning were busy, but the shower passed to the north of them.

The remainder of the night passed without any event of importance in the Gladiator's career, as did the following day. He visited Morgan Severn in the morning and found him greatly refreshed by his night's rest. He was still very grateful to his protector, and promised to be patient and do nothing rash.

Gold Gauntlet went away with the promise to call again early in the evening, and bring a supply of food, and this supply he made up just before dark.

He had put it aside and sat down to wait until it was fully dark when a man made his appearance at the door. The Gladiator looked up and recognized Phineas French, the vender of toilet articles.

The man was not a favorite with him. They had met casually, but French's volubility had not pleased Gold Gauntlet, and on the present occasion he favored the visitor with a short nod and no verbal reply to the Yankee's greeting.

"So this is where yew keep haouse," added Phineas, looking around sharply.

"Yes," the Gladiator curtly replied.

"Live alone?"

"Yes."

"Dew tell! Should think yew would find it pesky lonesome, I swan."

No answer.

"Lived here long?" continued Phineas.

"No."

"Settled for good?"

"No."

"Yew mustn't think it strange that I ask questions; I was brought up tew it. Down in Pine-Apple there ain't much tew talk about except what other folks dew, an' we sorter keep aourselves posted, yew see. But I dew declare that Pine-Apple is the daddy place; yew can't beat it in the State o' Massachusetts. Fack, stranger, by gosh!"

No answer.

"When I set aout tew peddle my toilet articles there was a most 'tarnal commotion in town; they said I'd lose ev'ry cent I'd put intew them. Land sakes, that wouldn't been much, 'tween yew an' me, stranger. I've got this town abowt canvassed, an' I don't mind sayin' that it needs a powerful sight o' faith tew make my remedies take effect. The Pearl o' Great Price Tooth Powder is poaty good, but it's nigh abowt all chalk, an' the Balm o' Beauty will hide the nat'r'nal complexion if the women put on enough—so would flour, if 'twould stick wal. The Elysian Eyebright Optic Bath may not brighten up the eyes, but it's harmless, 'cause it's only scented spring-water. As fur the Circassio-Orient Hair Tonic, it won't prevent the hair from growin', an' I know it!"

Mr. French paused and looked at Gold Gauntlet in a plaintive way, as though imploring him to confirm his opinion, but not a word said the Gladiator.

"Don't yew git lonesome here?" continued the man from Pine-Apple.

"No."

"Have much company?"

"No."

"I can drop in any evenin'."

"Don't!"

"Eh?"

"Don't!"

Phineas stared blankly. Gold Gauntlet's monosyllables surprised, but did not seem to anger him or hurt his feelings. He seemed a little puzzled to understand a man who lay there almost like a statue and took no interest in matters relating to the superior toilet articles he had for sale. After a little while his gaze wandered to the package which Gold Gauntlet had made up for Morgan Severn.

"What yew got in that bundle?"

The Gladiator quietly rose to a sitting position.

"Mr. French," he coolly replied, "that is my business, not yours. I wish to suggest to you that no man can attend to more than one business at once. Suppose that you devote all of your colossal brain-power to your chalk powders and water tonics, and leave me and my affairs alone. It will be a grateful change to both of us, no doubt."

Phineas looked considerably dazed by this address, but as its full force dawned upon him, he sourly answered:

"Wal, by gosh, yew needn't be so te'chy; I don't care anything abowt yew or yewr property! More than that, I don't believe I care tew associate with any one who ain't got any more manners than yew hev. I should blame yewr parents for the way they brought yew up, but I guess they had mighty poor material tew work on!"

The last words were spoken at the door, and then Phineas stalked away in high indignation. He went fifty yards, and then came to a halt.

"That feller was anxious tew git rid of me. Why? Mebbe he expects other company. I'll wait a little an' see, I vow!"

He settled down to wait, and thus it was that he saw Gold Gauntlet when the lattler came out

of the hut half an hour later. Despite the darkness, he could see that the Gladiator carried the mysterious package, and the Yankee determined to know what it meant.

Gold Gauntlet moved away, and Phineas followed with surprising skill and caution.

The former went at once to Severn's refuge. He found that man in a somewhat less satisfactory state than in the morning. His mind had been busy during the long, lonely day, and he had grown nervous and timid again.

Plainly, he needed to recuperate both physically and mentally before he would be himself again.

Gold Gauntlet remained with him for an hour, and talked in as cheerful vein as was possible. Severn's mind seemed to respond to each effort, and when the visitor left, the refugee was once more in a hopeful mood. The Gladiator, however, would not have gone away in such a satisfied humor if he had seen the dark figure skulking around the entrance to the little cave.

This was Phineas French, who was carrying out his resolution to know more about what was taking Gold Gauntlet and the mysterious package away.

"Another queer p'nt about Dan City," thought the Yankee. "I never got intew sech a place afore. I b'lieve it's bad as them old Bible towns in some respects. An' what a contrast it is tew Pine-Apple! I swan! it 'most makes the tears come intew my eyes tew think on't. There ain't no other place like Pine-Apple by gosh! But what is in this cave? I'm goin' tew know ef it takes a leg!"

Unconscious of the storm brewing behind him, Gold Gauntlet went his way. He had an appointment with Isabel Lovering, and as Joseph would be away, he was all the more anxious to keep it.

On this occasion he would make violin-playing a secondary matter, and devote all his time to Isabel.

For once she received him without her usual exhibition of sarcasm, and they settled down to make themselves agreeable after the conventional manner. Their usual subjects of conversation were not touched upon, and there was no occasion to quarrel.

Unconsciously, however, they approached a subject of more interest, when Isabel began to banter him in regard to his home in the gulch.

"Do you know," she continued, "when I see your habitation I am reminded of the castles along the Rhine. True, I have never seen them, but there is a decided resemblance. If your residence was at the top of the cliff, instead of its foot, and was somewhat larger, and there was a river at hand, I think the likeness would be striking."

"Thank you for your opinion," he replied, with mock gravity; "and now that my magnificent but has been brightened once or twice by your visits, I consider it superior to the castles of the Rhine—despite the 'ifs' and 'buts' which you mentioned."

"I always did admire fine houses."

"Like all your sex."

"I wonder that you don't give formal receptions there," continued Isabel in the same light vein.

"The size of the hut forbids my receiving more than two or three at a time, and as you have been there, I am content. My hut suits me well, Miss Lovering, for all the wild country about there is an adjunct to it. When I am in the mood, I wander around, and I tell you that I find rare wonders and curiosities."

The chance remark recalled something to his mind, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, he drew from his pocket the silver anchor.

"Here is something I found during one of my rambles," he added.

He extended the anchor, and Isabel took it carelessly, but the moment that she obtained a good view of it her expression suddenly changed. First a look of wonder appeared on her face—then doubt—then almost a startled expression.

"What?" she cried, half-unconsciously.

"A queer trinket, isn't it?" Gold Gauntlet replied.

"Who gave you this?" she quickly demanded.

"Nobody. I told you that I found it."

"Where?"

"In the hills."

"Yes, yes; but where?" she repeated, impatiently.

"To be exact, in a little valley where I keep my horse, about due east from my hut."

"You found this in the valley?"

"Yes."

Gold Gauntlet began to wish that he had kept the anchor to himself. Appearances indicated that Isabel knew something about it, and she was excited and really seemed startled. She turned the anchor over in her hands and examined it carefully.

"When did you find it?" she continued.

"Yesterday."

"Did it have the appearance of having lain long where it was?"

"Yes. The grass under it had turned yellow in places, which indicates that it had been there a matter of weeks, at least."

Was it his fancy, or did Isabel grow pale?

Surprised as he was, he could not but think that it was more than fancy. Her hands certainly trembled. He waited for her to speak, but she seemed to have nothing more to say. She turned partly away, and pressed one hand over her heart as though it was beating too heavily.

"Have you ever seen the anchor before?" the Gladiator finally asked.

"No."

"Or heard of it?"

"No."

"I thought that you recognized it."

"No."

Unless he was mistaken she was making an effort to regain her composure, and she suddenly turned toward him. Her face was far more composed.

"Mr. Jenkins, is this anchor of especial value to you?"

"Not particularly so."

"Will you give it to me?"

Gold Gauntlet did not answer at once; he sat looking at her sharply. The request satisfied him that there was more about the affair than he knew, and he hardly knew how to reply.

As he looked a moving object back of her attracted his attention. He shifted his gaze, and then sat motionless with surprise and dismay. A man stood outside the house, his face pressed against the window-pane, and that man was Morgan Severn!

CHAPTER XXX.

SEEKING TO ESCAPE.

TRAIL-LIFTER stood like a statue while Yank Yellowbird made his survey of the scene thus unexpectedly brought to his view upon the ledge. It was a discovery which threatened to bring calamity and destruction upon the fugitives.

The ledge was shaped like a crescent, with the shorter side next to the cliff, and the longer washed by the temporary flood. Near the center the cliff pushed a point of its face forward, as though for support—it will be remembered that it leaned forward, the base forming a recess under the top—and this point was within ten feet of the water.

Except for this point and the darkness, the two parties would have been visible to each other, and if the Danites should start out to investigate, ruin bade fair to overtake the fugitives.

They could retreat from the recess only by taking to the water again.

Yank Yellowbird gazed at the Danites for several seconds in silence, his gaze dwelling longest on Hurlforth's somber, forbidding face. At last he turned to the mute Modoc.

"We're in a most egregious fix, by burley," he said, but his voice and manner were as quiet as ever. "I'm summertime afeerd I'm goin' ter be skeered, fur my left foot is tremblin' now; a reg'lar thermom'ter o' fright is the weak sister. Still Tongue, this is an atrocious funny box ter be placed in, an' tain't so very funny arter all. Even the members o' the fair sex who take sech a delight in funerals couldn't be happy hyar. I'll thank ye, Modoc, ter go an' git Bronx. Thar ain't no use o' tellin' our hull crowd about this new tribulation. I consait, but Bronx has got a cool head an' good narves. Yas, you may call him, but don't skeer the gals; we won't add one item o' oneasiness ter their poaty heads."

Bronx was summoned, and duly admitted to the full knowledge of the case. That it was serious no one could deny or doubt.

The storm was still ragin'; the thunder boomed almost constantly; the lightning glared with startling vividness in their present situation; and the rain poured down in sheets. Of course it was constantly growing deeper in the gulches, and retreat was out of the question.

They were fairly hemmed in on the ledge with Hurlforth's men.

"But they may not have curiosity enough to make any exploration," suggested Bronx.

"Not ter-night, mebbe," Yank replied, "but what arter that?"

"Sure enough."

"The flood in the gulches won't go down as soon as it riz, an' when them atrocious insex looks fur a way out ter-morrer, they may not find any, but they will find us."

"That is evident."

"Can you see any help for it?"

"No. We can only leave here by swimming, and I am not sure that would work. The water runs past the ledge at full speed."

"It's out o' the question; we can't go away by water!"

"Nor up this cliff, which leans the wrong way for climbing."

"To be sure."

"Then we are hopelessly caged, and can only await the course of events and make a desperate fight when the time comes."

"Wait a bit, lad. We hav taken it fur granted that the Danites end o' the ledge is like ours—locked in by rock an' water. Now we don't know that; thar may be a passage beyond 'em, by which it is easy ter git ter the high country beyond."

"True, but we can't pass their camp unseen."

"Not while their fire burns bright, like it

does now; but bimeby they'll go ter rest fur the night. Then I kin pass 'em an' reconnoiter."

"Even if you find a path beyond, as you hope, will it not be hard to get the young ladies, and the horses, past the camp unheard?"

"Egregious hard!" Yank acknowledged, "but we won't borry trouble erabout that now. It's a peculiarity o' the Yellowbirds that they never look alicad when the view is onpleasant. Come, lad, le's go back an' cheer up our non-combatants. Still Tongue will stay hyar ter give us due warnin' ef danger should show up. We kin trust him, fur he's so proud o' his pedigree that he'd ruther die than let anybody git a p'int on him."

They returned to Dahlgren, Lovis, Inza and Scalping-Knife, the first three of whom were beginning to be uneasy.

"Thar ain't no trouble," Yank declared, answering a question from the Swede, "but we've been studyin' the weather closely. Thar's a good 'eal o' weather ter study, jest now, by hurley!"

The last remark was true in the full sense of the word. When they took refuge on the ledge they gained position above the bridge gulches, and there was nothing to hide the war of the elements. The lightning was something grand to behold, and it seemed at times as though one flash was actually pursuing another across the hills.

"A right lively time," continued Yank, genially. "This deluge reminds me o' the time when I was gineral helper ter a temp'rance lecturer; this bein' when I's younger, an' not so jealous o' the honor o' the Yellowbird pedigree as I be now, or I wouldn't been in bad comp'ny."

"I went 'long with the lecturer three weeks, from town ter town, an' we drawed pooty good houses. It's true they was mostly old women an' small boys, but ef they wa'n't opposed ter liquor they was liable ter be, the lecturer was so egregious eloquent."

"One day my boss called me inter his private room.

"'Boy,' sez he, 'hev you obsarved anything peculiarity about the water o' this town?'

"'Can't say I hev,' sez I.

"'It's too strong,' sez he; 'It needs adulteratin', an' I'm goin ter adulterate it. I'm preachin temp'rance, an' it ain't right that I should drink anything as strong as this atrocious water.'

"With that he brung a flat flask out o' his trunk. It was full o' a yaller liquid, the flask was, an' I thought mebbe it was hot-drops. The apostle o' temperance drinked it, an' I must say it did him good. He cheered up, joked with me, an' actooally danced a jig right thar in the room.

"That evenin' he was ter lectur' ag'in, an' afore it come off he tol' me he was goin' ter hev some weak lemonade ter pass around 'mongst the disciples—that's what he called the old women an' small boys—an' he sent me fur the lemons. He made the mixtur', an' poured in a lot o' the stuff I thought was hot-drops, laughin' like hurley as he did so.

"We had a very tol'ble house that evenin', thar bein' a hund'ud old women with specks an' umbrellas, an' a lot o' small boys the old women had dragged thar ter hear about the horrors o' rum an' sich. The boys looked a good bit melancholy, an' kept squintin' around at the door, as though ter see ef the way was cl'ar ter run, ef rum should attack 'em.

"Wal now, that was a lively meetin', by hurley! The lecturer was on the wire-edge o' eloquence, an' his tongue flew like a farmer's flail in thrashin' time. He stirred the old women up powerful, an' the more lemonade they drinked, the more they was in favor o' temperance. They pounded the varnish all off the furnitoor with their umbrellas, an' scart the small boys so egregious that three on 'em bad fits, an' the balance had the mumps or the dumps.

"Finally the lecturer stated that he wanted his dearly b'loved sisters, as he called 'em, should all j'ine in an' say a word. Land o' Goshen! you never seen the like o' what foller'd. Ev'ry woman jumped an' began ter cheer fur temp'rance, an' screech, 'Down with rum!' an' sech a circus was never seen afore sence Noah Yellowbird let his menagerie outer the Ark. I reckon the lemonade had got inter their eyes, fur each individooal woman began ter hammer some other woman over the head with her umbrella, an' the small boys 'most all swoonded away.

"At this p'int the lecturer, who was la'fin' like hurley, took me by the arm.

"'I reckon,' sez he, 'it's time fur us ter slope.'

"We did slope, an' got out o' town right away. He had a flask along, an' he drinked out o' it all the time pooty much. When we got a chance ter read the papers we seen that all the old women had been 'rested' fur bein' drunk, an' then he laffed more than ever, an' said he guessed it was time fur him ter quit the business. He paid me off, an' I never see'd him arter, but I've always thought that he wa'n't as good a temp'rance man as he might be, an' it's possible thar was too much water in that lemonade.

"I b'lieve the tempest is lettin' up a bit."

Yank passed from his reminiscence to the

last remark with only the slightest intervening pause.

It was a fact that the rain had greatly decreased, and the lightning was, perhabs, less vivid, but the thunder crashed without noticeable abatement.

The mountaineer arose and walked to the point of rock. Trail-Lifter lay there as motionless as the cliff, his gaze noting all that occurred in the Danite camp. The situation had not changed there; the men were trying to dry their wet garments, and did not seem to be in very good humor.

Yank returned to his own party. Louis and Inza were ignorant of the fact that the Danites were so near, and after some argument they consented to lie down upon a couch made of the blankets in the party.

The mountaineer, Bronx and Dahlgren then consulted. Yank was firm in the opinion that an effort ought to be made to pass the Danite camp. If they were on the ledge in the morning, it would be a miracle if the enemy did not discover them, and there was but one way to go; plainly, the water in the gulches would not subside so that they could leave in that way.

Time wore on. The rain ceased; the thunder rolled less frequently, and the lightning flashed from a greater distance.

The gulches, however, were river-beds through which coursed erratic rivers, which would be long in going down.

Some hours passed, and there was a change at the Danite camp. One by one the men lay down, until the last was wrapped in his blanket; there seemed to be no occasion for a guard.

Yank Yellowbird chuckled as he saw this.

It was midnight when he rose to his feet and said, in the most quiet way imaginable:

"I'm goin' now!"

Bronx shook his head.

"I need say nothing to a man of your shrewdness, but I shall await the result with great anxiety."

"To be sure, to be sure; I onnerstan' how you feel, lad. I consait all will go wal, but ef," and here Yank waved his fore-finger gravely at the younger man, "I should by any egregious ill-luck lose the game, I wish, ef you ever meet any o' the Yellowbird tribe, you'd tell 'em I went under upholdin' the fam'ly pedigree, an' bearin' the ravages o' the newrolgy like a hero, or as nigh so as was convenient."

So saying, the mountaineer shook hands all around, and then passed beyond the point of rock.

The venture was fairly begun.

Bronx Hendershot almost held his breath as he watched.

The Danites' fire was still burning, though not so brightly as before; yet it cast more or less light upon nearly all the ledge to the front and rear. Yank bent his tall figure, and keeping close to the cliff, where the shadows were darkest, glided along with catlike caution.

Every day Bronx had some new reason to admire this remarkable man, and his skill now was even more marked than usual.

Would he succeed in safely passing the Danite camp? Still as the men lay, some of them might be awake; if he was discovered ruin would inevitably follow. It was a period of keen suspense.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ORDER DISOBEYED.

ALL depended upon Yank Yellowbird. Even if he successfully passed the camp-fire it might not open a way of escape, but if he was discovered the blow would speedily fall.

Every moment Bronx expected to see one of the Danites start up and give the alarm, but when his gaze wandered back to the mountaineer he saw him gliding along like a dark shadow.

"The Indians call him 'Nevermiss,'" thought the young man; "pray Heaven he may now make good his right to the sobriquet!"

Yank did not once turn his head. His own gaze was always fixed upon the Danites with hawk-like intensity; he reached the most dangerous part of his journey; the crisis was at hand.

A moment of uncertainty—then he had passed the camp and was receding.

Bronx breathed a sigh of relief as the veteran disappeared in the darkness, and then his hand was grasped by Dahlgren.

"Life of me!" the Swede exclaimed, "a wonder that man is. My soul he fills with admiration, and with hope my heart. For him I shall pray ever if my children are rescued."

"What man can do, Nevermiss will do," Bronx confidently answered.

"You are right, but, truth that lives! with great fears my heart is yet filled."

"The way is dark!" muttered a voice by their side.

It was Scalping-Knife. He had come forward, and was gazing at the Danite camp with dull curiosity. He, at least, was free from the anxieties that beset the others, for realization of their peril did not penetrate his darkened mind.

Bronx requested Dahlgren to take the deranged man back out of sight. Conversation was dangerous there. The young man looked

at Trail-Lifter and envied him his stoical composure. The Modoc lay flat upon the ledge, his eyes fixed upon the Danite camp, his slightly-raised head reminding Bronx of a snake in coil—a resemblance not lessened by the fact that the mute's eyes were glittering brightly.

"Worthy follower of a matchless man!" thought Hendershot. "They make a pair hard to excel, and are all the more remarkable because their work is quiet."

Half an hour passed. Bronx had begun to be uneasy when a dark form appeared beyond the hostile camp; it passed as it had gone; and Yank was with them once more.

"Life of me!" exclaimed Dahlgren, "it is with impatience I am filled. What luck, mountaineer—what luck!"

"It might be a heap wu'ss, I consait. I hev found that ef we once git past them atrocious insex the way is tolerably clear fur us. It's egregious rough country all around, but nothin' that need worry us. Thar's a very fair path fur a hundred yards beyond the ineny's camp, an' the bulk o' the triberlation will be over when we git past."

"Can we pass?" Bronx asked.

"We kin try. One thing I don't like; sor-cumstances makes it nec'sary fur us ter leave our bosses hyar, an' help ourselves ter them o' the Danites over yon. I hate ter do it, fur my boss, Remorse, an' I hev been together a long time. But, never mind. Rouse the gals, Dahl-gren, an' le's hev it over as soon as we kin."

"We must really pass the camp, then?"

"Yas."

"I fear me for the result," admitted Dahl-gren, "but to where you lead I follow."

"To be sure. Wal, hurry up an' git ready." There was but little to do, and it was done without further delay. Lovis and Inza were startled to learn the exact situation, but they bore up in a manner which made Yank nod with emphatic commendation. Whether they could pass the camp, where the rattling of a loose stone would ruin all, was another matter.

Nevermiss still had full charge, and his orders were implicitly obeyed. Dahlgren was directed to remain until the others were past, having charge of Scalpingknife. Naturally, the latter was the most doubtful member of the party; he could not make reason aid his movements.

Yank once more alighted from cover. Bronx followed, conducting Lovis, and just behind them came Inza and Trail-Lifter. The young Indian was a bulwark of strength just then, and though his wild, dark eyes flashed as he looked at the Danites, he was outwardly calm, and even Yank could not excel his cat-like caution. The next few moments would decide all.

Yank, moving in advance, did not once look back. All his attention was fixed upon the sleeping men; every sense was on the alert to catch the first sign of danger. Had a Danite discovered them then, the mountaineer would have leaped upon him and tried to prevent an outcry.

The dreaded sign did not come; the adventurers passed on in safety, and soon stood on the other side of the camp.

Trail-Lifter lost no time, but glided back; then he and Dahlgren each took an arm of the deranged man, and Scalping-Knife was escorted past. He went obediently, but showed marked uneasiness until he was again near Bronx. Then his former placid expression returned.

Every heart beat lighter, and Yank and the Modoc proceeded to separate enough horses from the main party to suffice for them. It was successfully done; they mounted and rode away toward the south.

Once more the mountaineer led, while Trail-Lifter brought up the rear.

Yank had said well when he stated that the way was wild. Haste was out of the question, and the veteran was well satisfied to make steady progress. It might have been worse than that except for the lightning, the flashes of which were now of great value.

Dangerous chasms, or temporary torrents were often revealed by this friendly light.

For hours they rode on, slowly but safely. At times Yank paused and encouraged his charges in his own peculiar way, and such encouragement was needed. Lovis and Inza were almost ready to drop with fatigue; Scalping-Knife swayed on his horse and uttered complaints in a mournful voice; and even Yank's hasty form was affected.

When day dawned, and he saw the pallid faces behind him, he knew that rest was imperatively necessary. He consulted with the Modoc, and when they came to a shallow stream, rode through it for one-fourth of a mile to break their trail.

A cave would then have been a blessing, but all were strangers there and it was useless to look for one. They left the stream at a point where their horses would leave little evidence of passage, and in a rough part of the hills found a camp.

Yank prevailed upon all to eat something, and then, with the exception of himself, they lay down. They were asleep almost as soon as they touched their blankets.

The mountaineer found it hard to keep his eyes open, but his iron will had not deserted

him. He went a short distance away to a point where he could watch for danger, and then, resisting all inclinations to sleep, remained at his post for three weary hours.

At the end of that time he went back to camp. All his friends were sleeping, but a light touch served to bring Trail-Lifter to his feet, alert, bright-eyed and ready for work.

They consulted and, agreeing that it was not safe to resume the journey until night, Yank lay down to sleep while the Modoc went to the place of outlook.

The forenoon passed quietly, and the entire party met at dinner. This was not a meal to please an epicure; their supply of food was running low, and they dared not fire a rifle. No sign of the Danites had been seen, but there was no doubt that they were still active. All of the fugitives agreed that it would be best to wait until night before moving on; by that time they would be in much better condition, and the darkness would cover their movements.

After dinner Nevermiss gave distinct directions to all. He and Trail-Lifter would pass the afternoon in scouting and watching for danger, but no one person was to leave camp without his permission.

He was very emphatic in giving the latter direction, and all said that they understood and would obey.

He and the young Indian then went away.

It was three hours later that Yank discovered "signs." He investigated, and found that they were favorable. He saw two men riding east; he recognized them as old acquaintances; he accosted them and, though they were in some haste, secured their promise to join his party.

They were old bordermen, named Shaw and Price, and the prospect of having their aid cheered the mountaineer greatly. He led them toward camp in increased good spirits, but when within a hundred yards of it he suddenly came to a halt. He had almost run upon a man who lay prostrate and motionless by the side of a boulder.

Yank sprung forward and turned him over, and as the face was thus revealed he stood dazed for a moment. The man was Erik Dahlgren; he was unconscious; and a slight wound upon his head told a startling story to the veteran.

"What's up, Yank?" demanded Shaw, upon whom that expression was not lost.

"Foller me! foller me!" Nevermiss replied, in a voice very much unlike his usual one. Some egregious mishap has happened, by hurley!"

He ran to camp, followed by the other men. When the place was reached they saw only two persons; Scalping-Knife was idly watching the swaying shadow of a tree-branch, while Inza sat dozing by a rock. A few yards away the horses were grazing, and Yank believed that Bronx would be found there watching them, according to the directions.

The mountaineer hurriedly spoke Inza's name, and she sprung up with a startled cry.

"Whar's your sister?" demanded Yank; "whar's Lovis?"

"She and father have gone to walk," answered the girl, readily, but with a frightened expression. "Oh! Mr. Yellowbird, is anything wrong?"

" Didn't I say nobody was ter leave camp?"

"Yes; but father said they would only go a few steps—"

"I'm egregious afeerd they went too fur—I be, by hurley! Hyar, Bronx, lad; come this way. Never mind the bosses now, fur thar is more than them ter call our attention. I con—nit we're in an atrocious tribulation!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

BACK AT DAN CITY.

BRONX came hurrying into camp at the call.

"Do ye know whar Lovis is?" Yank asked.

"Lovis?" echoed Hendershot, his face growing very grave. "No, I have not seen her. You don't mean that she has disappeared, do you?"

"I'm egregious afraid I do. Little woman," to Inza, "tell us jest what you know, an' let it be done quick. Time is precious."

"I only know that Lovis was walking about here, tired of remaining still, and father said that they would go a few steps beyond the camp. She reminded him of what you said about not leaving, but he said they would go only a short distance. They went, and then I think that I must have fallen asleep."

"Our way is ter see Dahlgren," Yank continued, turning to Shaw. "The rest on ye stay hyar."

And before more questions could be asked he had hurried away. They found Dahlgren already showing signs of returning consciousness, and when Shaw had produced a flask and poured some whisky down his throat, the Swede opened his eyes quickly.

He had better command of his senses than was to be expected, and after one look at Yank's face he flashed a glance around him.

"Lovis!" he exclaimed. "Where is she?"

"Just what I want ter know," the mountaineer grimly replied. "Whar is she?"

"Oh! life of me!" cried the Swede, "she has

by Hurlforth been taken. He strikes me down senseless, and now if gone she is, Hurlforth has her!"

"Did you ree'lly see Hurlforth?"

"I did. We were here walking when upon us he sprung. Of him I barely catch a glance, and then he struck me. I feel a severe pain, and no more did I know. Life of me! the Danite has carried off my child, and my heart it will break!"

And the speaker moaned like an animal in pain.

Not a word of reproof did Yank speak. All this was the result of disobedience of his strict orders, but he would not add to the unhappy father's sorrow by reminding him of the fact. He helped Dahlgren to his feet, and then briefly ordered:

"Back ter camp!"

"But my poor Lovis—"

"Leave that ter me. Price, I'll trouble ye ter act as escort ter him; Shaw an' I'll stay hyar an' investigate a bit—yas, we may be gone an hour, but keep ev'rybody in camp; we don't want another egregious upset, by hokey!"

The two parties separated, and the camp became a place of mourning. Inza and Dahlgren were nearly overwhelmed, and as Price bluntly told the Swede that it was all his own fault, that unfortunate man saw his cup of bitterness filled to the brim.

It was nearly an hour later when Yank and Shaw returned. Every gaze was fixed anxiously upon the mountaineer's face, and he did not keep them waiting.

"Dahlgren's right," he announced; "Lovis is in Hurlforth's hands."

"My poor child!" murmured the Swede.

"But where are they?"

The last question came from Bronx, who was standing with contracted brows and a somber face.

"Gone back ter Dan City."

"The way is dark!" muttered Scalping-Knife, looking at Bronx with melancholy intentness.

"Have you a p'an, Nevermiss?" asked Hendershot, steadily.

"I consait I hev. Ter-night our party separates, an' Dahlgren, his remainin' darter an' Skulpin'-Knife will keep ou East, escorted by Shaw an' Price, who hev got ter go that way. Still Tongue an' I go West—back ter Dan City. You'll obsarve, lad, that I've left your name out; I thought mebbe you'd like ter make a pick o' which way you'd go."

Bronx's face brightened perceptibly.

"Then I shall go with you and the Modoc; I can't rest until Miss Dahlgren is rescued. But will the other party reach an honest town in safety? Will they not run upon the Danites?"

"No. Shaw an' I hev been scoutin', an' we find that the Danites hev turned back. Jest why 'twas done I don't know; the only reasonable theory is that they got discouraged. It seems that Hurlforth an' two or three o' his men were behind the others, an' they came upon Dahlgren an' Lovis by chance. Nat'rally, Hurlforth took her an' scooted fur Dan City. No; I don't think our frien's need be afeerd o' trouble by the way; the pursuit seems given up."

Yank had a vague idea that perhaps Hurlforth's abandonment of the pursuit was due to the fact that he was not so zealous a follower of Joseph Lovering as he seemed, but he did not mention it.

Trail-Lifter had been notified of the new misfortune, and as he came in the division was fully determined upon. At dark they left the camp. One party, composed of Inza, Dahlgren, Scalping-Knife, Shaw and Price, moved east, while Yank, Bronx and Trail-Lifter set their faces toward Dan City and rode away to meet whatever new dangers were before them.

Their lives would not be worth a breath of air if they fell into the hands of the Danites, but they were ready to risk everything for Lovis Dahlgren's sake.

It was noon of the following day, and Phineas French was sauntering through a canyon not far from Dan City. He had closed his career at the town as a vendor of unrivaled toilet articles, and intended to leave the next day—he thought it best to do so, for reasons which his toilet articles could have explained had they possessed strength enough—and he was now abroad in the hills because he had a temporary fancy for solitude.

His communion with Nature was destined to be interrupted, however; he heard his name pronounced as he was passing a rocky part of the way, and as he looked that way he saw Yank Yellowbird.

"Sakes alive!" he ejaculated, "is that yew?"

"To be sure. Why're you so 'stonished?" quietly replied the mountaineer.

"Considerin' haow yew left here, I didn't expect tew see yew back."

"How did I leave? I may ask."

"I didn't see yew, but report says yew robbed ev'ry Mormon o' all his wives, an' then scooted."

"Land o' Goshen! I ain't got their wives, an' I don't want 'em!" hastily declared Nevermiss.

"I'd rather hev a ragin' newrolgy all the time, by hurley!"

"Come 'round arter they've used my Balm o' Beauty an' Elysian Eyebright Optic-Bath awhile, an' you'll see some Hebes, mister."

"Don't want none o' yer Hebes!" retorted Yank, gruffly. "I do hope, though, that you've cheated 'em like hurley on them things you sell."

Phineas looked cautiously around.

"Neighbor, don't give it away," he replied, "but I've jest cheated 'em owt o' their eye-teeth. Nobody can't be brought up in New England 'thout gittin' a pooty fair idee baow tew trade, an' we at Pine-Apple don't take a back seat fur nobody. Wal, it would just paralyze them ter hum tew see how I've socked it tew these Mormons: it would, I swan! The Circassio-Orient Hair-Tonic, the Pearl o' Great Price Tooth-Powder, an' the Balm—"

"Never mind the list, mister. Pooty much all water, an' sick, ain't they?"

"A good 'eal o' water, an' mighty little sick, or anything but water," Phineas admitted. "Yew see, there's allays a heap said about Yankee interpose, an' I'm showin' the natives a sample on't."

"You're about as curi's a sort o' merchandise, yerself, as you kin peddle, but that ain't ter the p'int. You did us a favor once, as you'll remember, an' now I want ter know if your sym-pathies are still in the same quarter."

"They ain't with the Mormons—now that I've sold out my goods. What d'ye want? Is there another gal in the case? Yewr an awful feller, yew be, Yellowbird!"

"Land o' Goshen! don't you fly off in sech a crazy way!" tartly replied Yank. "It is a gal, an' it's the same one as before. The p'ints you give us enabled us ter rescue her, but now the atrocious insex hev got her back. Hev you seen Hurlforth bring in a pris'ner?"

Phineas shook his head.

"Ain't seen that piratical-lookin' critter of late."

"He's back hyar, an' he brought her with him. We trailed the creetur', an' I enjoyed it, fur I'd got my favorite boss, Remorse, back ag'in."

"I've got an idee."

"Name it, mister."

"Do yew know Gold Gauntlet?"

"I've seen him."

"I advise ye tew consult him."

"I consait I shall do nothin' o' the kind," Yank promptly replied. "I tried ter make friends with him, for he didn't appear ter be a Mormon, but he snubbed me."

"He wants tew see yew now."

"He does?"

"Yes."

"What fur?"

"I dunno. I saw him an hour ago, an' he asked me ef I'd seen yew, an' when I said I hadn't, he said he wanted tew see yew. He ain't a bad fellow ef he does dress like a fop, though he an' me come nigh havin' a row last night, I swan. Yew see, he had a half-crazy critter shut up in a cave; an' I was so curious about him that I investigated, an' it scared the feller owt; an' he run daown intew the village, an' nigh kicked up a row where Gold Gauntlet was visitin' Lovering's sister; but I got him away without anybody bein' the wiser, an' then Gold Gauntlet an' me made friends."

Phineas rattled on as though his tongue had solved the mystery of perpetual motion, but Yank was not much the wiser for the explanation.

"What kin Gold Gauntlet want ter see me fur?" he musingly asked.

"As I said, I don't know; but I hev an idee that it may be about the gal. It was right arter he saw Lovering that he mentioned it."

Yank looked Phineas straight in the face with a sharp, analytical gaze. He had a degree of confidence in that person, and in Gold Gauntlet, but it was not by any means perfect.

"Mister," the mountaineer replied, after a pause, "you may lead me ter the Gulch Gladiator, ef you will."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ALLIES.

GOLD GAUNTLET was alone in his hut. As indicated by Phineas, no harm resulted from the situation his curiosity had brought about the previous evening. His efforts to learn the mystery of the little cave had frightened Morgan Severn out, and the latter had gone straight to the village, his desire to find the Gladiator overcoming his fear of the Mormons.

When Gold Gauntlet saw his face at the window, as before related, he was considerably disturbed, and it brought his visit to Isabel to an untimely end. Somewhat to her surprise he suddenly claimed to have an engagement which he had before overlooked, and without coming to any definite decision as to whether she should have the silver anchor, he left the house and took Severn back to the cave.

He afterward came upon Phineas French, who made such a humble apology that the Gladiator decided to forgive him, and make a friend where friends were scarce.

Such was the situation when Phineas conducted Yank Yellowbird to the hut, and the Gladiator quickly arose and approached Nevermiss.

"My dear sir," he said, extending one hand, "I am glad to see you, and I want to apologize right at the start for my brusqueness the other night."

"Don't do it," Yank evenly replied; "it don't make an egregious bit o' diff'rence."

"I was influenced by motives of importance, believe me; but I now see that I was wrong. Mr. Yellowbird, I am glad to take in friendship the hand of such a celebrated man."

"Never mind that part; I ain't ter blame ef folks will talk about me, but it ain't fur what I've did myself. Fack is, the glory o' the Yellowbird pedigree hangs over me like a bushel-baskit over a baby's head—it's too big fur me. My father—his name was Hezekiah—al'ays tol' me I couldn't properly uphold the fam'ly honor. Member distinctly one time when he reasoned with me out back o' the barn. He had a stave o' a barrel, an' fur fear I'd forgit what he said, he hammered the facks inter me with the stave."

"You're an ongenerate son!" sez he, doublin' me up with a blow o' the board in the rear.

"Can't help it," sez I, with a howl; "I was badly bringed up!"

"Don't ye insult yer dad!" sez he, hittin' me ag'in.

"All right," sez I; "le's drop the argyment."

"You're full o' original sin," sez he, doublin' me up ag'in.

"I'm sorry," sez I, "but I inherited it, like humors, newrolgy an' beauty."

"The Yellowbird pedigree must be kep' sacred," sez he, hittin' me three lusty licks with the stave.

"Ef that's yer object," sez I, "bring on another stave an' let me do my part."

"I kin do it all," sez he, knockin' me about like a ball.

"All right," sez I, gittin' reckless; "wade right in, but you're wearin' my pants all out, an' the head o' the fam'ly will howl egregiously when he has ter buy a new pair."

"That's a fact," sez he, droppin' the stave. "we'll adjourn this council, an' the next time I hev cause ter c'reck ye, I'll use the stave on more Yellowbird, an' less pants. You kin go an' meditate now," sez he.

"So ye see, Mr. Gold Gauntlet, it was sech things as these that brought me inter prominence; not any fault o' mine. My ancestors was awfully sot on upholdin' the fam'ly pedigree, an' thrashin' their offspring. But I heerd that you wanted ter see me."

"Such is the fact. I've been hearing something about you."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"Nothin' good, I consait, fur the people o' Dan City ain't built that way."

"I have heard how you rescued the Dahlgren girls, only to lose one of them directly after."

Yank look earnestly at the Gladiator.

"Who tol' ye this?" he asked.

"One word, Yank. I am convinced that you and I may well be friends, and I will do my part if you, in return, will promise to be moderate and not injure my chances."

"How moderate?"

"I will help you get Lovis Dahlgren back, if I can, but you must not do Joseph Lovering harm. He is my game."

"Thought you'n he was great chums; you said so."

"Yank Yellowbird, I am about to trust you in a way that I would not dream of did not the whole West ring with your fame as an honest man. I am playing a part with Lovering."

"Wal, I hope you'll make it egregious warm fur him, by hurley!"

"Will you leave him to me?"

"To be sure—unless he gits in my way. But I must hev Lovis Dahlgren out o' his hands."

"I am heartily in favor of your doing this, and I will aid you. Have you any idea where she is?"

"No."

"I have!"

"That a fact? I think ye tol' me you'd let me know."

"And so I will, but I want to impress one fact upon your mind. The peril of this helpless girl—Joseph Lovering has confided in me—appeals to my heart as a man, but by trying to help her I put my own plans in jeopardy—plans which are as dear to me as my own life. Such being the case, I ask you to sympathize with me while I am sympathizing with you."

The Gladiator spoke earnestly, and Yank put out his hand suddenly.

"Shake, mister! I consait that we onnerstand each other at last, an' I don't see no reason why we shouldn't work tergether wal. I'll regard your interests, as fur as I know 'em, an' try not ter do ye harm."

"Thanks, mountaineer; and now as to Lovis Dahlgren. You know where Dan City Reservation is?"

"To be sure."

"I suspect that this so-called Reservation is held sacred, not because of anything the surface of the ground can show, but because there is a habitable place under ground—a place that is inhabited!"

Yank leaned his tall form heavily upon his

rifle and, looking into Gold Gauntlet's eyes, slowly and distinctly replied:

"Mister, thar's a heap o' hoss-sense in what ye say, but the half ain't tol' yit. Whar thar's a house, thar's a door. Whar's the door ter the place you speak on?"

"I think that I know."

"An' I know that I want ter know."

The Gladiator removed the table from its position and revealed the opening in the cliff.

"How's that?" he tersely asked.

"Do you mean—"

"I mean that an investigation is in order. Listen, and you shall hear the story of this hole in the wall, and the passage which leads where I believe Lovis Dahlgren now is."

He gave the full account, keeping back only the name of the man who had so singularly tunneled his way to liberty, and Nevermiss nodded emphatically at various times. Taken in connection with the sounds he had heard coming from under the Reservation, he felt that there could be no further doubt.

The only question now was, would the opening through which food had been lowered to the prisoner in his dungeon prove to be one which would lead them to the secret haunt?

They decided to settle this matter as soon as possible by a determined effort. Gold Gauntlet had already taken one step; he had constructed a rude ladder which he believed would reach to the top of the cell, and concealed it inside the passage. Both he and Yank were of the opinion that the investigation could not be made too soon, so the mountaineer went for Bronx and Trail-Lifter. They were soon all at the hut.

It was settled that Yank, Gold Gauntlet and the Modoc should make the venture, while Bronx and Phineas should remain at the hut, retreating to the sage if any one approached.

They were all ready for the venture when a shadow fell within the hut and, looking up, the Gladiator saw his protege, Morgan Severn. The poor fellow had once more become almost wild because of the solitude, and had ventured out.

He would have fled at sight of the other men, but Gold Gauntlet spoke quickly.

"Wait, wait, my man! You need not be afraid of any one here; they will all be your friends. Gentlemen, this is the man of whom I told you, Morgan Severn."

Bronx started back.

"Who?" he exclaimed.

"His name is Severn, Morgan Severn."

Other words trembled upon Bronx's lips, but Yank Yellowbird plucked at his sleeve.

"Carefully, lad! In the feller's egregious weak condition he mustn't know that his brother is dead."

Severn's attention had been attracted by Bronx's manner, and, forgetting his alarm, he quickly advanced.

"Is the name familiar to you? Have you heard it elsewhere?"

Bronx was quick-witted enough for the occasion.

"Nevermiss," he said, turning to the mountaineer, "have you the box we found at the foot of the cliff?"

"I consait I hev, lad," Yank replied, bringing out of his pocket the article mentioned.

"This has the name 'Morgan Severn' upon it—"

"It is mine!" Severn exclaimed. "Where did you find it?"

"In the mountains, at the foot of a cliff; and, by the way, that cliff was curiously inscribed with words and pictures."

"I know nothing about that, while as for this box, I am not quite sure when I had it last; it is a worthless article, anyway, as you can see. My name I scratched upon it while idling in camp one noon, on my way here. Possibly one of the men who accompanied me took the box, and afterward lost it."

"Was one o' yer men named Skulpin'-Knife?" asked the mountaineer, suddenly.

"No," returned Severn, looking puzzled.

"Scalping-Knife!" repeated Gold Gauntlet. "I have seen the unique ragamuffin who owns that name, and the picture rocks also. There is a mystery about that place, hinting as it does at a dark tragedy, that has interested me not a little. It hovers persistently in mind, in fact."

"S'pose we talk o' that later," suggested Yank, who was still fearful that Ralph Severn's supposed fate would be learned by this trembling-limbed brother of his. "I move that we go on ter Dan City Reservation right away!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXPLORATIONS UNDERGROUND.

BRONX HENDERSHOT, Phineas and Severn were left in the hut. Gold Gauntlet saw that Severn was not in fit condition to be left alone, and that he would never improve to any great extent while thus situated, so he decided that, if possible, he should be kept among friends from that time.

The Gladiator, Yank and Trail-Lifter entered the passage and went forward on their venture.

When they reached the dungeon where Severn had so long been confined it was found vacant, while a quantity of food on the floor, which had been newly lowered, showed that the escape of

the prisoner had not been discovered by his enemies.

"All seems well," observed Gold Gauntlet, "and we can go on with a measure of hope."

"Wait a bit, first," Yank replied. "I want ter ask a question. Has that man in rags o' yourn, Severn, ever mentioned a brother o' his'n?"

"Yes."

"Was his name Ralph?"

"It was."

"Does Morgan Severn know that his brother come ter Dan City awhile ago?"

"Great heavens, no!" answered Gold Gauntlet, with a start. "Is that a fact?"

"It sartainly is."

"Where is the brother now?"

Yank allowed the breech of his rifle to fall gently to the ground; he leaned his tall form upon the barrel and then tersely replied:

"Dead!"

Gold Gauntlet started back, an expression on his face very much like dismay.

"Dead!" he echoed.

"I consait he is."

"But how?—what? How do you know?"

"Sence it seems ter affeck ye summur I'll say that I didn't see the body, an' I don't s'pose I kin positively say the man is dead. I hope he ain't, but it looks egregiously like it, by hurley! He put up at the hotel, but it seems that Joe Lovering's gang knew he was dang'rous, an' when the poor feller fell sick with a fever, they lit on him. He disappeared, an' left a heap o' blood behind on the bed."

"I don't clearly understand. Will you give details?"

The mountaineer told the story of his experience with Ralph Severn.

"It does, indeed, seem that he was murdered," Gold Gauntlet thoughtfully commented.

"To be sure."

"Yet there is a grain of hope."

"Jest about a grain; he was too much out o' his head ter hev sense ter go away bissell; he hadn't no friends in Dan City but us; an' he allowed that the Danites was arter him. I consait they got him."

"This will be a severe blow to—to Morgan Severn."

"Egregious tough, by hurley!"

The Gladiator was silent for several moments, and busy with his thoughts; then he suddenly aroused.

"Let us go on with our work," he said. "Hold the light, Mr. Yellowbird, and Trail-Lifter and I will raise the ladder. We don't want to lose any time here."

The ladder was lifted, and they found that its length had been admirably calculated; the top rested against the roof which they could but dimly see.

"Now for the venture!" added the Gladiator.

With quick, firm steps he ascended the rungs, and, when the top was reached, found that the end of the ladder rested against an irregular hole in the roof. Everything was very dark there, but he signaled to Yank and the Modoc, and by the time they came up he had passed on to a firm, fairly level surface.

Trail-Lifter had carried the lamp somewhat protected, but its light was now allowed to shine forth for a short time as far it would go.

It showed that the cave was continued beyond.

"Now for the next step," said Gold Gauntlet, taking the lamp.

"Ef you'll allow me ter advise, we won't carry that light openly," replied Nevermiss. "Ef thar are spyan' eyes about they'll git onter it, sure, an' then we'll be in an egregious fix."

Thar may be danger ahead; I think thar is, fur the weak sister is beset with an inclination ter run; an' the odds may be ag'in' us."

"Your advice is good. The only objection to going in the dark is that we shall have to move very slowly, but safety is better than brilliancy. Will you lead?"

"We might go side by side."

They did so, and felt out each foot of the way. If this made Gold Gauntlet impatient, it was quite the reverse with the mountaineer. As usual he used his mind in the case, and was satisfied that their journey would be short. Unless the whole range was hollow, this cave would not continue a great distance.

They collided with solid rock several times as they went on, but always found safe footing, and had no cause for complaint. The policy of silence had been tacitly adopted, and they went without any sound except that of their movements—and it seemed to the Gladiator that he was making all the noise.

Yank and the Modoc were like two ghosts gliding along beside him.

Suddenly he felt his arm grasped, and the mountaineers uttered one word:

"Hark!"

Gold Gauntlet listened. He heard what had before then been inaudible to his unpracticed ears; a sound like the ringing of a pick on some hard substance.

"We're about thar," Yank added. "Go egregious careful, an' we'll soon hev a view of something!"

They advanced again, but only a few feet.

Passing a point of rock they saw a room of rock dimly lighted, with a rough roof of rock and grim sides. But this was not all; there were men there, too, some of whom held picks in their grimy hands. Very like ordinary miners they seemed, except that in most cases their faces were pale and thin.

Yank Yellowbird needed but a brief survey to find all his suspicions confirmed.

These men were captive miners.

Gold Gauntlet touched the mountaineer's arm.

"Are they friends or foes?" he asked.

"We'll make 'em friends, right away," Yank replied. "They're pris'ners—captives o' the atrocious Danites—an' the man who lib'rates 'em will find 'em friendly enough, I consait. Hullo! who's that?"

The speaker started, and then looked fixedly at one of the miners who was approaching. This man paused a few steps away, took a tin dish and caught some of the water which fell near him in a little stream.

"I'll tell ye what, men," he said, addressing his companions, "I wish this stuff was p'izon. I'd drink it all the more willin'ly. I'm tired o' this life, an' ef it don't change soon I'll assault one o' the guards, as Sam Trask did, an' let him shoot me!"

He spoke in a moody, hopeless tone, and there was no response from his friends; one and all seemed to feel in about the same mood as himself, and there was no attempt at consolation.

Yank Yellowbird, however, broke the silence.

"Abe Partridge!" he said, in a low voice.

"Wal, what is it?" asked the man with the dish, in a most indifferent way.

"Come this way."

The direction was obeyed in a sullen manner, which showed that the man believed it to be given by some enemy; he obeyed like a slave who has nearly made up his mind to rebel. Yank drew his companions partly back around the rock, so there was no one to see them except the man who came shuffling up.

"Wal, what's wanted?" he asked in a surly voice.

Nevermiss uncovered the lamp.

"Don't ye know me, Abe?"

The man looked sharply; he started, and a look of recognition flashed over his face.

"Good heavens! have they got you too, Yank?"

"No, they ain't got me!" grimly replied the mountaineer. "I'm hyar as a free moral agent, though I dunno what that means. But see hyar, Abe, time may be mighty precious; my frien's an' I hev crawled in hyar on the sly ter see what sort o' place this is, an' I must say I am most egregious surprised ter see you hyar."

Partridge caught the veteran's arm in a grasp the intensity of which was painful.

"Yank!" he exclaimed rapidly, vehemently, "ef you come in hyar o' yer own will, an' can git out ag'in, go at once. You don't know the sort o' place this is; it is a purgatory among men. Do you know what we be hyar? Slaves, ev'ry one on us; slaves who are ground down an' abused, an' shot like dogs, an' worked ter death. If the way is open fur ye, go back afore they hev you in their grip. Go! go! go!"

His voice rose to a high pitch, and his eyes blazed with excitement, but Yank did not lose his calmness.

"Wait a bit," he replied. "What we want ain't ter run away, but ter help you out."

"What kin you do ag'in' all them men?"

"Are there a heap on 'em?"

"Wal, not so very many, but they are armed ter the teeth, an' they'll shoot anybody that rebels. They've done it before, an' they'll do it ag'in."

"Ef I onnerstand it, they hev got you men hyar as pris'ners, an' make ye do something fur them. Do what!"

"Work the mine—dig gold."

"To be sure. How many guards?"

"About fifteen."

"How many pris'ners?"

"Thirty-two."

"Land o' Goshen! you ought ter clean 'em out!"

"We haven't a weapon, while they're armed ter the teeth, as I said afore, an' al'ays on the lookout. Ef one o' us kicks, he's shot down like a dog."

"Who's at the head o' the atrocious insex?"

"Joseph Lovering."

Partridge spoke in a moody, hopeless way, but his manner suddenly changed, and he grasped Yank's arm:

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "the guard is back at his post, an' your retreat is cut off! You are doomed men!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOPE FOR THE PRISONERS.

YANK YELLOWBIRD could not avoid a slight start at this information, which was all the more startling because he did not fully understand what it meant; but as his gaze followed the direction of Partridge's pointing finger he

saw a light in the passage by which they had entered, and near it was a man who held a rifle in his hands.

"The egregious varmint is in the way, sure enough," the mountaineer coolly replied, "but ef you'll explain a bit, I shall know better what it means."

"He is stationed thar," Partridge replied, "so that we can't pass. Wa'n't he thar when you come?"

"No."

"He must 'a' left his post 'thout leave."

"He's back now," Yank grimly replied.

"Yas, an' you're doomed men; you never kin pass him alive."

"Brother Partridge," observed Nevermiss, shaking his bent forefinger at his companion, "the Yellowbirds make it a p'nt never to say die. I've been beset with newruagy all my life in a malignant form, an' I hev a left foot that is a weak sister, but in spite o' all obstacles, I won't stay down, an' I will rise ter the top like a cork. Tribulations an' distresses will come in the course o' nature, but they git egregiously wu'sted in the end. That atrocious insex looks po' ty formidable an' mean with his shootin'iron held up so pert, but I'll beat him yit—the fam'ly pedigree must an' shall be preserved."

"You don't know what you speak on so light," moodily replied Partridge.

"No; but I'm hyar fur p'nts. So this is a mine?"

"Yes."

"Run by Joe Lovering, eh?"

"As nigh as we kin find, Lovering an' a few more o' the crowd at Dan City is playin' a game on the bulk o' the poperlation. Blessed few on 'em thar know o' this place at all, an' Lovering, Hurlforth, an' them that are in the secret are gittin' all the gold."

"I must say that fur a villain, Joe Lovering is a good 'un!" Yank declared. "He's got as innocent a face as a baby, unless ye look sharp an' read deep, an' he looks too dandyish and womanish fur any good in this world, but that head o' his is a long 'un, by hurley!"

"An' his heart that o' a tiger!"

"Whar has he collected all his pris'ners?"

"Wharever he could find us."

"Any women hyar?"

"Yas—seven."

"Is thar a young gal named Lovis Dahlgren?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"We come in thinkin' she might be hyar."

"She is not; I am positive of it. Dahlgren! Strikes me I've heerd that name; yas, thar was sech a fam'ly in Tobe Moss's train."

Yank recognized the name of the old borderman who had been the guide of the ill-fated train of which he had already heard so much.

"Tobe Moss! Is he hyar?"

"Yas."

"Wal, I know now what's become o' them!" the mountaineer observed. "Nobody hyar named Ralph Severn, is thar?"

"No."

"I thought not."

Yank spoke in a melancholy voice, for the interest he had taken in young Severn at the hotel had never ceased. He was reluctant to believe him dead, yet such seemed to be the only reasonable decision. For a moment the mountaineer was silent; then he suddenly aroused.

"Ter business, Partridge, ter business!" he exclaimed. "I consait 'tis time fur a gin'ral upheaval 'round hyar. You say ye hev thirty-two men hyar as pris'ners. Now ef them men was armed, an' should revolt, they'd make things egregious lively, wouldn't they?"

"Yas, but we ain't got a weapon."

"S'pose I git 'em for you?"

"You forgit you are now inside the cave, too."

"I don't forgit that I'm goin' ter git out!" retorted Nevermiss, quickly. "Why, man, I could lead the hull lot on ye right out now; at least, the squad on ye near by; but that ain't prudent. The result would be you'd all be let loose without a weepin', an' the Danites fall on ye an' massacree the hull outfit, I consait. No, we must go slow an' careful. I know a place in Dan City whar arms an' ammunition is stored, an' I hev the men ter git them. We will git them; we'll arm you pris'ners up; an' then thar will be a most atrocious commotion in this hyar nest o' vipers."

Yank stroked his beard placidly, and seemed to feel all the confidence imaginable.

"God bless you fur the promise!" exclaimed Partridge, in a tremulous voice. "I only hope that you kin do it."

"We're goin' ter try hard. An' now, as I consait it ain't policy fur us ter stay hyer, we will go out. Ain't thar any way fur us ter pass that guard onseen?"

"No. Thar is only one passage."

"I don't like ter set onto him, an' knock him over, fur that would betray our hull game. S'pose thar was a commotion 'mongst you pris'ners—would he come ter see what was up, or not?"

Partridge meditated.

"I reckon he would," he finally replied.

"Then you an' one o' yer frien's must hev a fight."

Partridge's pale face flushed with hope.

"It shall be done," he declared.

"My comrades an' I will hide as nigh the guard as we kin go, an' when he comes ter see what the fight is about, we'll slip past and git out o' this egregious hole on the run. See?"

Partridge did see, and after some further conversation—a part of which was to the effect that rescue might be expected about thirty-six hours later—they prepared for the great attempt. Yank, Gold Gauntlet and Trail-Lifter crept as close to the guard as was safe, and then crouched down in a little niche to await the result.

Presently there was a noise from the prisoners as of contention—angry words, threats and the like—and then an increased commotion, as though the men had become engaged in a fight.

The guard at first paid no attention, but as the noise increased, he muttered a few angry words and stalked away.

He soon reached the point of rock, turned it, and saw two men apparently engaged in a bitter fight.

"Here! let up on that!" he cried. "No fighting here. Break away, or I'll put a bullet through you!"

The men "broke away" with fear that was not all assumed; they knew that the guard would shoot them if he took the notion.

"Now, then, what's the row?" he added.

"Briggs called me a liar," explained Partridge, humbly.

"And you took it up?"

"Yes."

"Probably Briggs told the truth, but I don't care a picayune either way. Your fight can end right now. If you go at it again, I'll shoot you both. Hear?"

"Yes," said Partridge, soberly.

"And you, Briggs?"

"Yes."

"See that you remember it."

The guard returned to his post, and the slaves of the mine listened with painful attention for at least a minute. Not an unusual sound reached their ears, and then Partridge and Briggs shook hands.

"Thank Heaven!" said the former, "Yank an' his friends hev got clear!"

He spoke the truth; the adventurers had passed the guard, and were at that moment in the dungeon where Morgan Severn had passed his weary days. When they left this they partially blocked the hole in the wall where he had drilled his way out, and then went on to the hut.

Bronx, Phineas and Severn were anxiously awaiting them.

There was now much in the case that was encouraging. Bronx and Gold Gauntlet agreed with Yank that they could probably secure arms and ammunition to supply the prisoners of the mine, and if this could be done, the combined forces would be a party not to be despised.

They were in number exactly forty men, and of these all except Severn were able to do hard fighting if such a course became necessary.

Yank had noticed that a cloud had rested on Bronx Hendershot's face from the time they announced that there was no news of Lovis, and the mountaineer hastened to return to the subject.

"The great question now is," he observed, "what is the missin' little woman?"

"I can only believe that she has been returned to Joseph Lovering's house, the place from which we before rescued her."

"I consait you're right, lad; but ef you be, we won't hev so easy a time gettin' her ag'in. Joe will take better care o' his stolen jewel."

"Gentlemen," quoth Phineas French, "I have an idee."

"Le's hear it, mister."

"In the prosecution o' my legitimate business o' peddlin' my onrivedal toilet articles, the Elysian Eyebright Optic-Bath, the Circassio-Orient Hair Tonic, an' other articles," laboriously began the New Englander, "I hev often found it tew my advantage tew use diplomacy, an' the pleasantest part o' diplomacy is tew mash the servant-gals so they will help me cheat their mistresses. Wal, among my mashes in Dan City is a servant at that house o' Lovering's where he keeps his wines, an' I'm certain she will tell me all she knows about the matter. Ef the Dahlgren girl is there, my Susie will know it, an' she'll tell me, tew."

"Mister, you're a brick!" declared Yank, shaking French's hand. "You're jest the man we want, an' ef you kin learn what ye say it'll do us an' egrégious heap o' good."

"I'll go right off. It's about eight o'clock, an' Susie will be threw with her day's labors."

Phineas arose, and after a few directions from Yank, went out into the darkness.

It was two hours later when he returned, and he brought the news that Lovis was not in Lovering's house. The servant girl had been positive on this point.

"That p'nt is settled," Yank thoughtfully remarked, "an' I am now o' the opinion she's in Lovering's other house—his sister's house."

CHAPTER XXXVI.
JOSEPH PLAYS THE VIOLIN.

ANOTHER day had dawned.

Joseph Lovering was passing slowly through the village. He had just come from the house which was most properly to be considered his home, and was on his way to that over which Isabel presided.

He was not in a happy frame of mind, for there were dark clouds on the horizon which threatened to break forth into a storm and overwhelm him. Hurlforth had returned from his last expedition and brought Lovis Dahlgren, but, after all, his mission had been a failure.

Inza had escaped, and so had Yank Yellowbird and his friends. The last fact was startling. These men would in all probability carry news of Dan City and its methods to places not in sympathy with Dan City, and for a long time it had been Joseph's haunting fear that he would be exposed.

This fear at last bade fair to be realized.

Yank Yellowbird was a man to be feared by such as he, and he knew it very well. He dreaded to think what Yank might do, yet he could not help dwelling persistently upon the subject.

He was nervous, excited and alarmed.

Moreover, he blamed Hurlforth. He felt that the dark-faced marshal had too readily given up the pursuit, and that his slip might be the ruin of all.

An unhappy man was Joseph Lovering, and he was going to Isabel, to be cheered by the sight of her noble, womanly face. She was the one bright spot in his life, and he realized it, but he could not, or would not, keep within the light. Crime and he were old friends, yet he went to the bail rather because he was weak than because he was brutal. Good and bad were strangely mixed in his nature, but the good was choked and crushed almost out of sight by the rank weeds of sin.

Entering the house he was informed by a servant that Isabel wished to see him in the parlor. He entered.

"Good-morning, Isabel," he said, in a tone kinder than usual.

"Good-morning, Joseph. Sit down; I want to talk with you."

She spoke very quietly; too quietly to please him. There was something unnatural in her voice and manner, and his gaze sought her face in an eagerly questioning way.

"Do you? I am glad," he managed to say.

"Wait a moment before you say that," she gravely answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Joseph, who have you put in the east room?"

His face flushed, and a startled expression appeared in his eyes. His gaze fell, and though he tried to speak, no words passed his lips.

"Some one is there, and you have stationed Jackson Berry at the door as a guard. You thought, perhaps, that as that portion of the house was but little used, I should not discover that the room was occupied. I have discovered it; I have questioned Jackson."

"What—what did he say?" stammered Joseph.

"What did he say? What do you suppose? He was put there by you, and given distinct orders. He says that he does not know who is inside; that you have the key of the room; and that he can give me no information."

Joseph moved uneasily. Isabel looked at him unwaveringly, but though there was much of indignation in her gaze, it was more one of sadness.

"You know," she added, "that before I would consent to come to Dan City you promised me a separate house where I should be entirely apart from—from your family. You know that I was, and am, strongly opposed to the people here and the principles of Mormonism. We need not argue the question of who is right or wrong—let it suffice that I was opposed to Mormonism, and only consented to come here when you promised that I should not be brought into association with any of the followers of your new faith. Now, what of the person in the locked room?"

Joseph had grown sulky while she spoke.

"If you think it is one of my wives, you are mistaken," he peevishly replied.

"Then who is it?"

He did not reply.

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"A woman—and in a locked room. Am I to understand by that that she is a prisoner?"

Again he moved uneasily. This close questioning had forced him into a corner, as it were, and however he might answer he would still be in trouble.

He determined to tell the truth.

"She is a prisoner," he admitted.

"A prisoner, and in my house. Oh! Joseph, I did not think this of you!"

Tears came into her eyes, and Joseph's brows contracted into a savage scowl. He was as much ashamed as angry, but the latter feeling was strengthened by a disposition to brave it through, and he revealed only the worst side of his nature.

"I'll take her away," he growled.

"Where?"

"Perhaps to my house—perhaps somewhere else."

"You don't say that you will set her free."

"I don't intend to set her free!"

"Who is she, and how was she unfortunate enough to meet you?"

"You are too inquisitive—and too sarcastic," Joseph irritably replied. "We will let the matter drop."

"Do you insist upon keeping her against her will?"

"Since you must know—yes."

Isabel rose. Her face was pale, and she pressed one hand over her heart as though in pain.

"Then I shall leave Dan City—and you."

"But I told you I would take her away from this house," he remonstrated.

"That is not enough; I cannot consent to remain with a brother who would stoop so low as to do as you say you will. My heart bleeds for that poor girl, Joseph! I do not know who she is, but she is a sister woman—and you are my brother! Joseph, is this in keeping with the lessons of honor our dear mother taught us, years ago?"

Isabel's voice was tremulous with feeling, and her eyes dimmed with tears, but she did not touch Joseph's heart as she wished. Pale with anger, he arose and stood beside her.

"You have said enough!" he answered, in a cold, hard, tense voice. "I will hear no more. I should be false to every instinct of my manhood if I allowed a sentimental girl to turn me from a settled purpose. I will not hear you. No, no!" he angrily cried, as she tried to speak, "you shall not utter any more such nonsense; you have said enough already. If you don't like my way, you can leave Dan City as soon as you choose. For the present, leave this room! Go!"

He pointed to the door as he spoke, and after one long glance at his angry, implacable face, she obeyed.

She went with tears flowing down her cheeks, and a sharp pain at her heart, yet the fall of Joseph was not the fall of an idol. Cruel as a boy and vicious as a man, she had known him before only too well.

Try as she might in the past she had never been able to give him place in her sisterly affections as a hero—the last revelation had only been new proof of his depravity.

It was overwhelming, however, and from that moment she never wavered in her determination to leave him and Dan City.

The door had barely closed behind her when the piano began to send forth wild, fierce music. He had sat down to it and was playing viciously. An ordinary musician would have made a discordant jumble in such a mood, but not he; his playing, savage as it was, was strangely attractive, in a weird sense.

"It reminds me of Byron's *Manfred*, somehow," thought a man who had paused at the outer door with his hand upon the bell.

This man was Gold Gauntlet.

He rung the bell; a servant admitted him; and he was ushered into Joseph's presence. The latter's face was flushed, and he arose to receive his visitor with an effusiveness in keeping with his excited mood.

"My dear fellow, is it you?" he cried. "I am delighted to see you—you and your violin. Drop your hat somewhere, and get out the violin; I am just in a mood for playing, and we will make the echoes ring. The devil is reigning in my mind, to-day, and we'll fit our music to the occasion."

There was a strange glitter in the Gladiator's eyes, but Joseph did not see it. He had returned to the piano and was rattling off some wild tune.

"I'm afraid you will have to count me out to-day," Gold Gauntlet answered; "I had a fall last night and sprained my wrist, and I can scarcely wield a bow now. I brought over the violin to see if you wouldn't officiate at it for once."

"Of course I will," Joseph airily replied. "Pass it over. What shall I play? Music is all very well, but there isn't enough *diablerie* in it for men of brain and muscle."

Despite this assertion, he began to play the violin in the same fierce way that he had played the piano, yet in the harmony of style so much a part of his nature.

He finished one tune, and then, with only a brief pause, glided into a second—rushed into it, more appropriately. It was a strange, weird tune, which but few persons could have named, but upon Gold Gauntlet it seemed to have a strange influence.

At the beginning he had started, and then became very quiet, but it was well that he sat where Joseph could not see his face. He was eagerly drinking in every sound, and his face bore an expression which would have startled the player had he seen it.

If ever face expressed enmity, the Gladiator's did at that moment.

Quiet as he was, he was far from calm, and his hands nervously closed and unclosed as he listened.

It was music to affect any one strangely, yet there was more than ordinary interest in Gold Gauntlet's manner; that tune had a meaning to

him which it would not have had to any other person.

He was struggling to be calm, for he did not want to have Joseph see his agitation, but it was no easy task.

He had spent money, time and patience for the sake of hearing that tune played, and he heard it at last!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE REVOLT.

The door-bell rung, and in a few minutes a servant appeared and said Hurlforth had sent word that he wished to see Lovering at the marshal's office. No clew to the business on hand was conveyed, but Joseph was not reluctant to obey the summons.

He did, however, request Gold Gauntlet to wait until he returned. With the tenacity with which men will hope in the darkest hour, he now hoped that Hurlforth had some good news to communicate. Perhaps Yank Yellowbird had been captured.

If such was the case, he could return and make merry with the Gladiator, anon, with some interest.

Gold Gauntlet agreed to this arrangement very quietly, yet he was by no means sure that he should await Joseph's return. He was in a mood where he felt the need of meditation before he made any action. As few words as had passed between him and Joseph, he had made a discovery since he came.

Lovering went away, but the Gladiator was not long left to himself. There was a knock at the door and Isabel entered.

She had grown culmer, but he detected signs of agitation even then. She greeted him mechanically, and then abruptly said:

"You are left alone, I see."

"Yes; Joseph has just been called away."

"I have news for you, Mr. Jenkins."

"I shall be pleased to hear," he replied, making an effort to speak in the old manner.

"I dare say you will," Isabel significantly answered. "I am going to leave Dan City."

Gold Gauntlet started and looked at her blankly.

"Leave here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am."

"May I ask the cause of this sudden step?"

"One reason is that I don't like Dan City. I leave here this afternoon, never to return!"

Her manner was very quiet now, but he knew that no ordinary reasons were actuating her. The day before she had said nothing about leaving Dan City.

"I am greatly puzzled to understand this, Miss Lovering," he admitted.

"It is not worth puzzling over; simply accept the statement as I have made it, and let the matter rest as it is. It is of no consequence. I knew you were alone now, and as we have said a good many light things in our brief acquaintance, I came to let you know that Dan City will soon know me no more. I shall, however, remember that it was I who fixed upon you a name which bids fair to remain with you a while—that of Jerry Jenkins."

Her manner had grown a trifle less grave, and the last words were spoken with a very apparent effort at bantering lightness. She dropped it, however, and more slowly added:

"I must ask you to excuse me now, for I have yet to make my preparations for departure, but I thought that we were such old friends—we played the comedy well, didn't we, 'Mr. Jenkins'—I ought to say good-by to you. So, now, old friend, look your last on me!"

Again the assumption of gaiety, which did not seem very successful, but Gold Gauntlet quickly arose again as she made one step backward toward the door.

"Wait, Miss Lovering!" he exclaimed; "you are not allowing me a chance to say a word. Pray, what have I done that you talk of saying good-by forever to me?"

"You have done nothing that I can in the least object to, but—have we not been playing a part?"

"Yes; and why shouldn't we continue it?"

"What do you mean?"

"You say that you are going to leave Dan City. So am I. Why should we say farewell forever?"

"I thought that you were very much interested in Dan City."

"Then you thought wrong. Like you, I shall soon leave here, and when I go I should like to feel that I have made one friend worth keeping, and kind enough to allow me to be her friend—yourself."

"I am going East," suggested Isabel, hesitatingly.

"So am I," avowed the Gladiator.

She looked at him and smiled in a half-amused, half-sad way.

"Come," he added, "may I continue to be your friend?"

"If you wish."

He saw the increase of color in her cheeks with pleasure, and was astute enough to understand what it meant. He had a certain power

over her and was glad of it. Just then he did not remember that he had said in the past that, in order to be avenged upon Joseph, he must break Isabel's heart.

He took her hand and thanked her gravely.

"As a special favor to me I would like to have you postpone your departure from Dan City twenty-four hours," he said presently.

"I was just thinking of it, and on the whole I don't know but I will do it."

"Do so, by all means. And now may I ask one question?"

"Certainly; but as to the answer—we will see."

She smiled faintly as she spoke; the shadow of Dan City life was upon her, and she was afraid to hear the question.

"Miss Lovering," Gold Gauntlet gravely continued, "is there a young lady held prisoner in this house?"

It was a risky question, but he had decided to dare it. Isabel started, and a startled expression appeared on her face.

"Why do you ask that?" she returned.

"Not from any idle motive, believe me. If there is such a young lady—the one I have in mind is a total stranger to me—she is certainly unfortunate, and deserving of the sympathy of a sister woman. I do not believe that one as noble as you will withhold such sympathy."

"I am afraid you are flattering me with an object," Isabel answered, "but I am going to reply promptly to your question; I am floating with the current, and have reached a point where it don't matter much what I say. I will not be a party to any crime, if Joseph is at the bottom of it. There is such a girl held prisoner here!"

The day had passed; midnight had come.

There was no thought of sleep among the slaves of the mine; they were too nervous and excited to sleep, when the next few hours might settle their fate one way or another.

Yank Yellowbird had assured them that on this night he would come to their rescue, and those who knew the mountaineer placed more faith in that promise than they would had any other man made it. Yet the cooler-headed of the party could not but admit that the chances seemed overwhelmingly against them.

They had made a pretense of going to sleep as usual, and then Partridge and Tobe Moss lay down where they could see the guard, and began a painful watch.

Hour after hour they kept their gaze upon the slowly-pacing guard.

Midnight arrived.

The two men had exchanged a few words, and thus diverted their gaze, but as they looked back they made a discovery. The guard was not visible. What had become of him? Had he left his post without leave, as he did when the visitors came?

While they looked a man came in sight, carrying a long rifle over his shoulder, but it was not the guard. Partridge and Moss shook hands with joy too great to be expressed in words—the man was Yank Yellowbird.

After him came Trail-Lifter, Bronx Hendershot and Gold Gauntlet.

Partridge and Moss hastened to greet the rescuers.

"Hullo!" saluted the mountaineer, in his usual genial way. "So you're hyar, be ye? We was egregiously afeerd we'd find ye away from home, an' it would hev been vexatious ter me, arter comin' through the atrocious damp passages with a ragin' newrolgy which makes my teeth rattle like marbles in a bag."

"Yank Yellowbird, I was never so glad ter see any man afore!" declared Moss. "I've heerd o' you an' yer imaginary neuralgia, an' I must say you're a brick."

"I s'pose ye mean wal, mister, an' we'll let it pass, but don't cast any mud an' sich on the Yellowbird pedigree by insinuatin' that my newrolgy is suthin' else. I know an epidemic or a tribulation by name at sight, though I knew a doctor once who al'ays determined what his patients was a'flicted with by writin' the names o' eighteen or twenty diseases on slips o' paper, puttin' 'em in a hat an' drawin' one at random. Ef he drawed a slip that said 'roomatiz,' he doctored the patient fur roomatiz, even ef he's down with a ragin' fever; an' ef the paper said 'dropsy,' he doctored fur dropsy, ef the man was lean as a rail."

Nevermiss paused for a moment, and then, pointing his long finger at Moss, gravely added:

"Ef you think that doctor was weak-minded you're egregiously mistook, fur he could make out a bill that was amazin' ter see; an' it re'e'lly made his patients sicker'n ever. But this ain't ter the p'nt. Everything easy an' quiet inside?"

"Yas. What about the weepsons?"

"We've got 'em; we raided the Danites' arsenal, an' we kin now arm yer 'ull crowd. Git 'em tergether, an' we'll make a horstle army outer 'em in short order."

The prisoners of the mine were ready for their part, and as soon as possible the arms and ammunition were brought into the cave and properly distributed.

Then all was ready for work.

Of course they might have left the mine

secretly, by the way the rescuers had come in, but this did not suit the temper of the slaves. They had been held there a long time; they had been made to labor hard every day to dig gold for their captors; their immediate masters had been inhumanly brutal, and some of the prisoners had been shot down without just provocation; and now that the tables were turned their first thought was of getting square with such of the Danites as were in the mine.

Yank did not offer any objections, and the slaves collected at the proper point and swept upon their enemies. Alert guards prevented a total surprise; the foe sprung to arms to meet them; and for a short time a fierce and sanguinary struggle went on. When it was over the late slaves were masters of the mine, and some of the Danites would never see the dawn of another day. Smarting under the memory of their wrongs, the rebels had struck hard.

A search of the cave was then made; a work in which Yank and Bronx eagerly took part.

What they had hoped for, but hardly dared expect, came to pass.

In a part of the cave to which only the Danites had before had access they came upon a man who lay upon a sick bed, delirious with fever. Even when they arrived he took no notice of them, but continued to mutter in a broken disturbed way.

The man was Ralph Severn.

It was a welcome discovery, but he was then in a precarious state. The fever had reached a point where it would soon change for better or worse, and no one could say which way it would turn.

While they were standing by his side Trail-Lifter entered the recess with long, light steps. He called Yank's attention, and then his nimble fingers began to cross and recross each other in the old way, as he conveyed some message to the mountaineer.

"Land o' Goshen!" Nevermiss then exclaimed, "thar is work fur us ter do som'ers else. Still Tongue says thar is fightin' in the village; that Hurlforth has led a rebellion ag'in' Joe Lovering, an' they're a-slashin' like hurley. Men, we want a hand in that—follow me!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE END OF CRIME.

HURLFORTH was master of Dan City. Secretly and craftily he had worked up the rebellion against Joseph Lovering, and when he struck the blow was irresistible. A little handful of men stood by Joseph, but a merciless volley from Hurlforth's men had finally prostrated nearly all.

The fighting was over and the marshal was looking for Joseph, whom he had seen fall, but a new diversion occurred.

Down upon the party swept the ex-slaves of the mine, with Yank Yellowbird, Gold Gauntlet and Bronx at their head. Hurlforth was not the man to yield a point; he ordered his followers to stand firm, and they it was who fired the first volley.

Dan City had never seen another night as wild as that, and for a few minutes the women trembled in their several places of hiding as the report of rifles was mixed with the shouts and cheers of fighting men. Then all that died away, and a silence fell upon the town which was all the more impressive because few of the non-combatants knew who had won.

Victory was not with the Danites; they had been routed as completely as they had routed the followers of Joseph, and the fate of the two leaders was strikingly alike and tragical. Hurlforth had been shot dead by Tobe Moss, and Lovering lay in front of his own house, so near to death that they dared not move him.

In that hour Isabel forgot all except what she and Joseph had been to each other, and she was by his side, supporting his head and doing all that she could to soothe his last moments. He knew that he was dying, but there was a firmness about his manner which was not bravado and, certainly, was not born of faith.

Then to his side came a man who folded his arms and looked down at him in silence, until Joseph caught his gaze and uttered a cry.

"Morgan Severn!" gasped the fallen potentate.

Isabel looked up with a start, and then it was her turn to cry out.

"Morgan!" she exclaimed, and she put out one hand, the other being clasped upon the dying man's. "Oh! I am so glad that you have come. See! Joseph is here!"

Severn smiled somewhat bitterly.

"I know, Cousin Isabel," he answered, "but if you will take my advice you will leave him alone."

"Leave him!" echoed the girl, reproachfully. "Leave my own brother!"

"He is not your brother!" quickly replied Severn. "When you came West to join him all your friends objected, for he had been the black sheep of the family. My brother, Ralph, and I were your cousins, and your nearest relatives; had we been at home at the time I think you would never have left, but our influence was lost. When we came home we brought a strange secret, but brought it too late to stop

you. Joseph is not your brother; he is not a Lovering at all. The old papers we examined while away proved that he was a foundling, adopted out of pity by your parents. Probably this is news to him, but it can be proven."

"What difference does it make?" Joseph asked, with an effort. "I am dying, and I don't care what blood is in my veins. But you, Isabel—you had better draw apart from me. I have nothing sentimental to say, but I admit that I have been unworthy of you. You don't know the story Morgan Severn has to tell—it is little fault of mine that he is alive."

"We will not speak of it, Joseph," replied Severn, choking back his resentment against the man.

"It makes no difference to me," Joseph retorted; "I don't ask your forgiveness. Who else is here who wants to accuse me?"

Gold Gauntlet, who stood near, took two hesitating steps toward the dying man, but paused before his movements were observed.

"Your brother, Ralph, is alive," continued Joseph, "though he has to thank good luck for it. Coming here to hunt you up, Morgan, and to see Isabel, of course, he fell sick at the hotel. My men abducted him, and in his feverish delirium he stabbed one so severely that he nearly died from it. I was in a mood more merciful than usual, or I should have had him put out of the way. By the way, Morgan, do you know what became of the two servants who started to Dan City with you?"

"No. I never saw them after your men seized me, and took me to the mine."

"One of the servants is dead; the other lives, half-crazy, and calls himself Scalping-Knife. My men tried to seize both, but they escaped, though one was mortally wounded. This man died in the mountains. He wished to leave a statement of his trouble and yours, and, lacking paper and pencil, actually began to print the story upon the smooth face of a cliff with the artists' pigments originally belonging to you, Morgan, but he fell dead before he had done more than the first half-dozen words."

"Scalping-Knife" could not read or write, but, knowing what his fellow servant had wished to tell, he started to reveal the facts, as best he could, by means of pictures.

"He was half insane with fear at the time, and his picture was vague. Remembering that at the time my men lassoed and captured you, you were upon your knees and looking at the silver anchor which you carried as a curiosity, he pictured the scene as well as he could, but, being overcome by his fears before it was done, he ran away and left it unfinished."

Isabel glanced at Gold Gauntlet. The silver anchor, lost in the hills by the Danite who stole it from Severn, had been found by the Gladiator, and she had seen it in his possession.

A shiver on Joseph's part brought her gaze back to him.

"It is nearly over!" he gasped.

"Joseph," she whispered, "Loris Dahlgren has been released from our house by her friends. Shall I ask her to forgive you?"

"No," he muttered, "I wan't nobody's for-giveness. What good will sentimentality do now? I've got to go, and I'll stand by the life I've lived. It's been a dark life, and the road ahead is fitfully dark. I don't know where the road leads to, but I've got—to—go—that way!"

He gave a slight start, and was off on the road.

Morgan Severn raised his cousin.

"Come, my poor Isabel," he said, gently, "and do not grieve. Remember that he was not your brother, and remember what he has been!"

As he led her away Gold Gauntlet turned to Yank Yellowbird and Bronx Hendershot.

"To you two men," he said, "I will briefly tell a story which I have decided to relate to no one else. I came West to hunt Joseph Lovering down. Once I had a dear friend who was very poor in worldly possessions, but rich in musical talent. I was a sailor, and I came home from a voyage to find my friend murdered. He had made the acquaintance of another fine musician; they had been much together, and, buying a lottery ticket, had together drawn a rich prize; but to have all the money, the unknown had murdered my friend."

"Such was the news I heard when I came home. My friend was murdered; the assassin was unknown. I resolved to learn who the guilty man was. To make a long story short, I'll say that the matter finally resolved itself into this: If I could find a man who played one certain tune—composed by himself—upon the violin, I would have the guilty man. The tune was taught me by one who, lodging in the next room, had heard the tune played, and had heard my friend speak of it. As it was the murderer's own work, and not published, it was not likely any but he would play it."

Investigation satisfied me that Joseph Lovering was the man, but I had no proof. Knowing that he had a very critical musical ear, I learned to play the violin well, and then, dressed as a Western sport, came here to wait for Joseph to play that one tune. He played it yesterday, and I know he was the murderer. Of course this was

not irrefragable proof in law, but it satisfied me; it was enough.

"Death overtook him before I could strike, but, for various reasons, I am very well satisfied, indeed, with the course affairs have taken."

He glanced toward Isabel as he spoke.

"Ef you're satisfied, I be, by hurley," Yank replied, genially. "This has b'en ruther a savagerous night, but I consait only the atrocious insex o' the case hev b'en hurt. Lovering an' Hurlforth are dead, an' thar won't be much o' a crowd o' Danites left. The late slaves o' the mine will very properly take possession o' the gold they dug. I'm afeerd, though, that I'll lose my good frien' Bronx. See how he's gone over to console Lovis, an' how her eyes brighten up. Young people naturally gravitate toward each other; it's b'en so ever since Adam Yellowbird married Eve Smith an' settled down at Eden. The Yellowbird pedigree shows an egregious lot o' sech cases, but I've escaped so fur. Trail-Lifter an' I sorter tread a road by ourselves."

Yank and the young Indian looked at each other with very friendly eyes, Trail-Lifter made a gesture, and then Nevermiss added:

"To be sure, Modoc; to be sure. Yas, when thar is any honist folkses ter be protected from atrocious insex we ginerally manage ter be around—we do, by hurley!"

What changes have the passing years made? It will be suspected that Isabel married Gold Gauntlet, and that Lovis became Mrs. Bronx Hendershot, but it is well to add that Morgan Severn, when fully recovered, prevailed upon Inza to become his wife, and Ralph, also recovering, made a matrimonial bargain that pleased him greatly.

By this it will be seen that there was a good deal of "marrying and giving in marriage," but in each and every case happiness has followed.

Erik Dahlgren is with his daughters in Wisconsin. He learned that Hurlforth was an Eastern fugitive from justice whom he ought to have recognized; and this was why the emigrant train was attacked. Hurlforth dared not see Dahlgren settle peaceably at Dan City.

Scalping-Knife has recovered his wits to a great degree, but will never be what he was before his fight in the Utah hills.

Phineas French has returned to Massachusetts and lives in a degree of luxury on the profits of his "unrivaled toilet articles," but though he proudly exhibits to his friends what purport to be letters of recommendation from the ladies of Utah relative to the Elysian Eyebright Optic-Bath, and other articles, it is doubtful if he would care to meet the alleged writers.

Bronx manages to hear from Yank Yellowbird occasionally, and it is a pleasure to him to know that the mountaineer and Trail-Lifter continued to be the friends of the worthy and oppressed.

The singular pair parted with their friends of this history with regret, but to Yank and the young Modoc there was no other place equal to the wild, free West.

THE END.

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